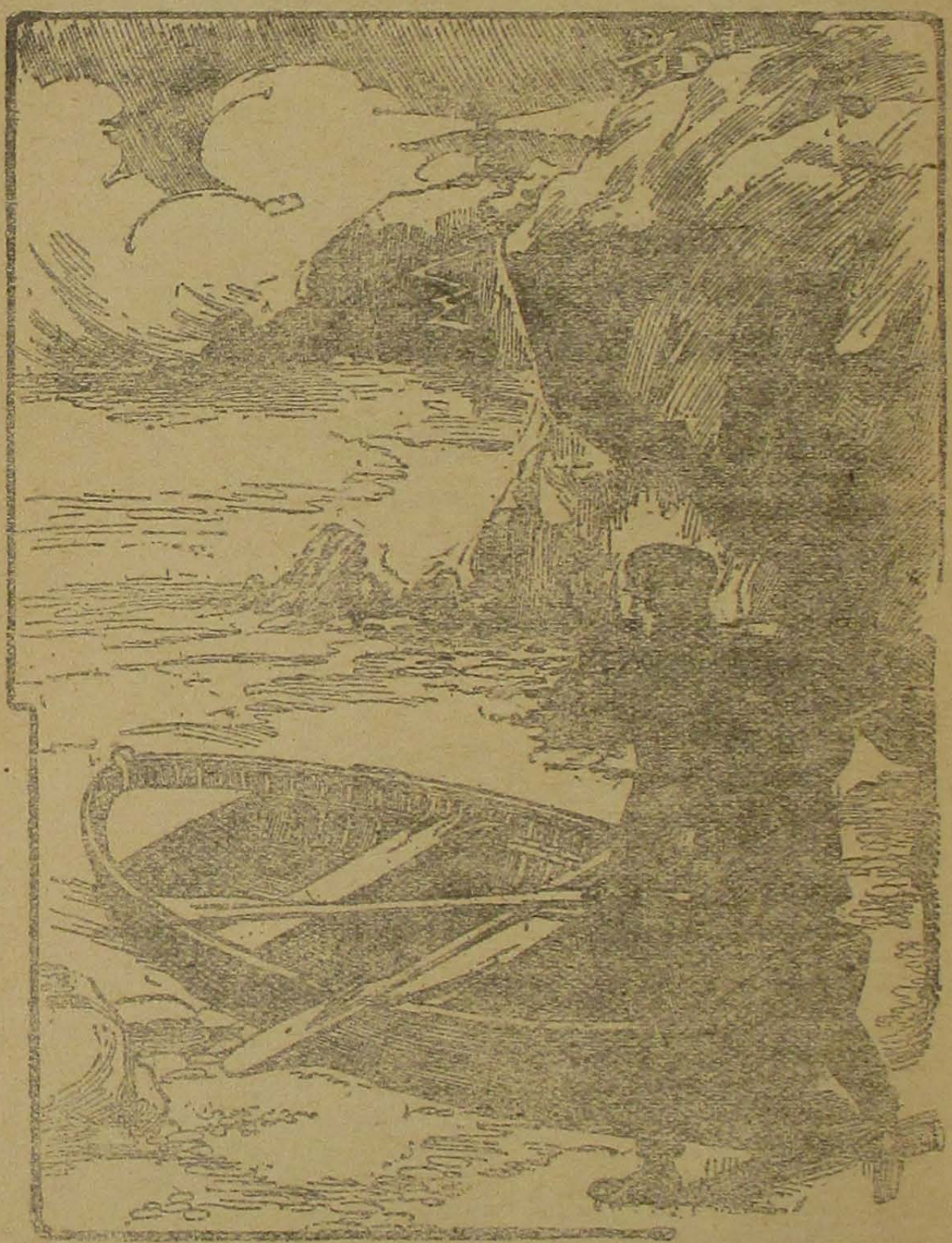
AN INTERRUPTED WIG WAG or, A Boy Scout Trick



An Interrupted Wig-Wag

OR

A Boy Scout Trick

By

CAPT. V. T. SHERMAN

Author of

THE WAR ZONE OF THE KAISER;
BOY SCOUTS WITH JOFFRE; THE
CALL OF THE BEAVER PATROL;
THE BOY SCOUT SIGNAL, Etc.

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Boy Scouts in Northern Wilds

or, The Signal from the Hills

Chapter I

A CAMP ON MOOSE RIVER

Four Boy Scouts, of the Beaver Patrol, Chicago, were in camp on Moose river. They were all athletic young fellows, not far from seventeen years of age, and were dressed in the khaki uniform adopted by the Boy Scouts of America.

If you take a map of the British Northwest Territories and look up Moose river, you will discover that it runs through nearly three hundred miles of wilderness, from Lake Missinale to Moose Bay. The reader will well understand, then, how far "Sandy" Green, Will Smith, George Benton and Tommy Gregory had traveled from civilization.

The camp of the Boy Scouts was situated some fifty miles up the river from Moose Factory, a trading point famous in old Indian days for its adventurous spirits and its profits to the factors. Those who have read the preceding books of this series will doubtless remember the four Boy Scouts named above. Together they had visited the Pictured Rocks of Old Superior, the Everglades of Florida, and the great Continental Divide.

During all their journeys the boys had shown courage and resourcefulness beyond their years, and because of these qualities they had been chosen by Mr. Horton, a noted criminal lawyer of Chicago, to undertake a difficult and dangerous mission to the Hudson Bay country.

They had traveled by way of the Canadian Pacific to Missanabie, from which point they had proceeded to Lake Missinale. Here they had purchased a "Mackinaw," a great flat-bottomed craft, in which to transport their tents and supplies down Moose river to the bay of the same name.

They had made most of the journey in native canoes, which they had learned to handle with considerable skill, but now and then they had taken refuge on the big boat, "just to stretch their limbs," as they expressed it. They left Chicago late in September and it was now almost the last of October.

Those who live in the Hudson Bay country declare that they have three seasons in four months. Spring comes in June, summer in July and August, and autumn in September. At the southern extremity of James Bay, October may scarcely be called a winter month, although during the latter part of the month ice and snow are not infrequent.

The sun was setting on the lads' first day in camp as the boys rested from their labor of dragging in great quantities of both dry and green wood. Their tents were of double canvas, specially prepared for cold weather, and their bedding and suits had constituted an important part of their baggage.

Almost the entire fronts of the tents were composed of fine, strong silk mesh-cloth. The faces of the boys were well anointed with grease, and masks

of mesh-cloth hung about the tents ready for use.

Mosquitos and an insect known as the "bull-dog" had driven many a trapper and hunter out of the swampy regions around Hudson Bay. During the summer it is almost impossible to live in the swamps of that country at all. By protecting their tents and faces, and keeping great "smudges" going, the boys hoped to be able to live in comparative comfort during their stay in that section.

"Look here, Will," Tommy said, as he laid down a great armful of dry wood, "some one ought to invent some kind of a contraption to kill these flying pests off by the billion. Here it is almost cold enough to snow, and we're being eaten alive by mosquitos."

"I reckon it wouldn't do much good to invent a way of killing the brutes," Will suggested, "as long as the swamps and pools of the Northwest Territories are turning them out at the rate of a billion a minute."

"I read a story about how to get rid of mosquitos the other day," Sandy said. "It might be a good idea to try it."

"You can always read how to do things, in the newspapers," Tommy argued. "The only trouble is that the ideas don't work."

"This one will work," declared Sandy. "The way to kill mosquitos," he continued, "is to throw a great long rope up in the air. You let it stay up in the air; that is, one end of it, and grease it carefully with cold cream and tie a piece of raw beefsteak at the upper end. That will attract the mosquitos. Then when you get several millions up the rope, you cut it in two about twenty feet from the ground and pull the lower end down."

"It'll be the foolish house for yours!" Tommy laughed. "How are you going to throw one end of a rope up in the air and make it stay there?"

"I didn't say how to make it stay up in the air," grinned Sandy. "I just said you had to make it stay up in the air. Then when the mosquitos get tired of staying up in the ambient atmosphere, they'll come crawling down the rope and fall off where you cut it."

"I guess your dome needs repacking all right!" laughed Tommy.

"And then, when they come to the place where the rope has been cut off, they'll take a tumble for themselves, and you stand under the line and beat their heads off with an axe."

"Poor child!" laughed Tommy.

"If you leave it to me," George declared with a grin, "that story about how to kill mosquitos came out of Noah's ark on crutches."

The sun was setting over the great wilderness to the west, and the boys hastened to pile more wood on the fire. The forest was alive with the cries of birds, and the undergrowth showed curious eyes peering out at the intruders.

"This beats little old Chicago," cried George, bringing out a great skillet of ham. "When we live in the city, we've got to eat in the house and smell dishwater. When you live out doors, you've got a dining room about a thousand miles square."

"And when you live in Chicago," Tommy continued, "you can't get fresh fish right out of the brooks. When you want a fish here, all you've got to do is to run out to the river, grab one in your arms, and bring him in!"

"Then run out and get one now!" advised Will.

"Perhaps you think I can't!" shouted Tommy.

Seizing a head-net the boy dashed away to the margin of Moose river. His chums saw him walking about in quest of a minnow for a moment and then heard the swish of a line. In ten minutes he was back at the camp with a whitefish weighing at least five pounds.

There is incessant fishing in the wilderness north of Lake Superior throughout every month of the year. All through the long winter the ice is cut away in order that the fish may be reached, and there is every sort of fishing between that which engages the labors of sailing vessels and men, down through all the methods of fish-taking, by nets, by spearing, still-fishing and fly-fishing.

Though the region has been famous, and therefore much visited, for many years, the field is so extensive, so well stocked, and so difficult of access, that even today almost the very largest known specimens of each class of fish are to be had there.

"These are the kind of fish the Indians live on during the winter," Tommy explained as he scraped the scales from his prize. "Only," he continued, "the Indians don't clean them at all. They simply make a hole in the tail end of each fish and string them up like beads on sticks which they set up in racks."

"I never did like cold-storage fish," Sandy declared, in a tone of disgust. "They taste like dry corn meal!"

While the fish cooked and the boys sat in the protecting smudge of the campfire, the sound of paddles was heard up the river. The swish and splash came

on steadily for a moment and then suddenly ceased.

"I thought we were going to have company," suggested Will.

The boys listened for a time but no further sounds were heard.

"Now what would any one be doing in this wilderness?" Sandy asked. "What would any one be sneaking around us for?"

"Perhaps they don't even know we're here!" argued George.

"With that great campfire going?" scoffed Tommy. "Why, they can see the light of that fire for ten miles or more!"

"That's right," replied George. "I guess that fire wouldn't help to hide our presence here any."

"Suppose I go and see what's doing?" asked Tommy.

"You know your failings, young man!" Will cut in. "If you go out in the wilderness to see who's running that canoe, you're likely to get lost, or come back here after a couple of days with a broken leg or a busted coco! You'd better stay in camp."

"But I want to know who's sneaking around our tents!" insisted Tommy. "You come along with me, Will, if you think I'm not competent to go alone," the boy added with a grin.

Will hesitated for a moment and then providing himself with an automatic revolver and an electric searchlight, the two boys left the camp and soon disappeared in the darkness. They had been gone scarcely five minutes when a shot came from the thicket.

Chapter II

THE LITTLE BRASS GOD

After a time George and Sandy heard some one running through the undergrowth, and the next instant Will and Tommy burst into view. It was evident that they had been running, for they were panting and their clothing was disarranged and torn in places.

The two boys hastened out to meet their chums with question marks in their eyes. Will and Tommy offered no explanation until the tents had been reached, then Tommy burst into a low chuckle.

"Can you beat it?" he asked.

"What are you talking about?" demanded George.

"What did you see out there?" asked Sandy.

"We didn't see a thing!" declared Tommy.

"You're wrong there!" Will cut in. "We saw the flash of a gun!"

"Some one shoot at you?" questioned George.

"Perhaps not," Will replied, "but I heard a bullet whizzing past my ear! That's not a very warm welcome to this blooming country, I take it."

"What's it all about?" asked Sandy impatiently.

"That's the answer!" Tommy declared. "That's all we know about it ourselves. We hear a paddle splash in the water; we go out to see what's doing, and we get a chunk of lead plugged at us. That's the answer so far as I know. Now, how about this fish?"

"Right as a book!" cried Sandy. "I've been taking care of this fish while you've been out there facing some boy with an air gun."

"Yes," laughed Tommy, "if you want to find boys with air guns, come out here about three hundred miles north of nowhere!"

The incident did not seem to affect the appetites of the boys, for they attacked the fish industriously. When the meal was finished and the dishes cleared away, Will turned to his chums with a sober look on his face. When he spoke it was with suppressed excitement. "Do you boys know exactly why we are in the Hudson Bay country?" he asked. "How much did Mr. Horton tell you?"

"Nothing at all!" Tommy replied.

"He just told us to come with you!" George cut in.

"When I tried to cross-examine him," laughed Sandy, "he said he was afraid we wouldn't go if he told us what sort of a game we were mixing in."

"Well," Will went on in a moment, "he told me to tell you after we got into camp on Moose river."

"Go on and tell us, then," chuckled Tommy.

"I don't believe it's any great mystery!" Sandy interrupted.

"We came here," Will said, speaking seriously, "to find the Little Brass God. Odd sort of a quest, that, eh?"

"What's the Little Brass God?" demanded Sandy.

"Did you think it was a load of hay?" asked Tommy. "The Little Brass God is the Little Brass God. Didn't you know that?"

"What does any one want of a Little Brass God?" asked George.

"The Little Brass God," Will explained, "is believed to be valuable, chiefly for what is contained in his belly."

"So this is a stuffed god?" cried Tommy.

"Has he eaten something he can't digest?" cut in Sandy.

"That just explains it!" Will exclaimed. "He has eaten something he can't assimilate, and we've been sent up here to relieve him of it!"

"How did the Little Brass God ever get into the Hudson Bay country?" asked Tommy. "I should think he'd know better."

"I reckon the Little Brass God had nothing to say regarding his journey," replied Will. "Two months ago the house of Mr. Frederick Tupper, on Drexel Boulevard, Chicago, was burglarized. Besides taking considerable money and silver plate, the thief also carried away the Little Brass God."

"I don't think any thief in his right mind would do that!" declared Sandy. "What could he do with a Little Brass God? He couldn't pawn it, or sell it, or trade it. without its being traced back to him!"

"Well, he took it just the same!" Will replied.

"How much is he worth?" asked George.

"Not more than five dollars."

"Then he isn't one of those East India Little Brass Gods with his legs crossed, and his arms folded, and a grin on his face?"

"His legs are crossed, his arms are folded, and there is a grin on his face!" replied Will with a smile. "But he's certainly not one of the population of a Hindu temple."

"Just a common Little Brass God, probably made

in Newark, New Jersey," suggested George. "What do they want him for?"

"They want to search him!" replied Will.

"Aw, come on, tell us all about it!" urged Tommy.

"Well," Will explained with a smile, "the tummy of the Little Brass God is supposed to contain the last will and testament of Simon Tupper, father of Frederick Tupper."

"Gee!" exclaimed Tommy. "Can't he get the property until he gets the will? Then we'll have to find it, I guess!"

"No, he can't get the property unless the will is found."

"Who stole the Little Brass God, and also the will?" asked George.

"Did he know he was stealing the will when he stole the Little Brass God?" asked Sandy without giving Will an opportunity to reply to the previous question. "How'd he know the will was there?"

"We don't know whether he knew about the will or not," answered the boy. "In fact, we don't know whether the document is still in the tummy of the Little Brass God. That's what we've got to find out."

"You didn't tell me who stole the Little Brass God and the will," insisted George.

"I said it was a burglar!"

"But was it a burglar—a real, genuine burglar?"

"Yes, loosen up!" shouted Tommy. "Did he go there just to burgle, or did he go there to get that will?"

"That's another thing we've got to find out!" Will answered. "It's just this way," the boy continued. "We've been sent up here to find this

Little Brass God. When we find it, we'll know whether the man who stole it was a common thief, or whether he was sent by interested parties to do the job. No living person can open the Little Brass God without first learning the way to do it. In fact, the only way the toy can be opened by one unfamiliar with the secret is to break it open with an axe! And that would hardly be done, as the little fellow is rather a cute plaything."

"And so, if the will is there, a burglar stole it. And if the will is not there, some one interested in the disposition of the property walked away with it! Is that it?"

"That's the way we figure it out!" Will answered. "And in the meantime," he continued, "an older will is being offered for probate. If the Little Brass God fails to disclose the last will, the property will go to a young man who was intensely hated and despised by the man who built up the fortune. Simon Tupper will turn over in his grave if Howard Sigsbee, his nephew, has the handling of that money."

"I can't see how that's going to get Simon anything!" grinned Tommy.

"Now," George asked, "why do they think the Little Brass God was brought into the Hudson Bay country?"

"We have traced it to an antique shop on lower State street," Will answered. "From there to the shabby parlor of a fourth rate boarding house on Dearborn avenue, from there into the possession of a French Canadian who hunts and fishes in the Moose river district."

"That's pretty straight!" George agreed.

"How do they know this French Canadian got this

Little Brass God out of town?" asked Sandy. "You take a French Canadian of the trapper sort, and get him well tanked, and he'll sell the ears off his head for another drink of brandy. Perhaps he hocked the Little Brass God."

"If he did," Will answered, "the search must begin all over again!"

"Who put this will in the tummy of this Little Brass God?" asked Tommy.

"The man who made it—Simon Tupper," answered Will.

"Did he tell anyone where it was?"

"On his deathbed, he told Frederick Tupper, his nephew, where to find it. It's a pity the young man didn't remove the document and file it in probate court. It would have saved a lot of bother."

"But he didn't," George suggested, "and that gives us a fine trip to the Hudson Bay country."

"When was the house of this Frederick Tupper burglarized?" asked Sandy.

"On the night following the death of the old gentleman."

"Had the villain of the drama, this Howard Sigsbee, any knowledge concerning the hiding place of the will?"

"He was not believed to have."

"Do they think he went there and got the will himself?"

"Huh!" objected Tommy. "If he'd gone after the will himself, he'd have taken it out of the Little Brass God and carried it away with him. And he'd have made a pile of ashes of it in about one minute, at that!"

"Perhaps he couldn't open up the merry little chap," Sandy suggested.

"We don't know whether he understood the secret or not," Will answered. "All we know is that the Little Brass God was still intact a week after it had been stolen."

"Then he knew the combination, or he didn't get the will!" argued George.

"Anyhow!" Tommy laughed, "we've got only about a million or more miles of country to search over for a little brass god about——"

"Say, just how big is this Little Brass God?" asked Sandy.

"He's about six inches in height, and three inches across his dirty shoulders, and he certainly is about the ugliest specimen of a heathen beast that ever came down the pike."

"What would that French Canadian buy him for?" asked George.

"That's another thing we've got to find out," replied Will.

Tommy was about to ask another question when Will held up a hand for silence. The leaping flames were sending long streamers of light into the thicket on either side and over the glistening waters of Moose river. The circle of illumination extended for some distance on every side, except at the back of the tents, where the level ground lay in shadows.

As the boys listened, the soft sound of a moccasined foot came to their ears. It seemed only a yard away, and yet it was not in sight. George dashed to the back of the tents, followed by a sharp cry of alarm.

Chapter III

THE CABIN IN THE SWAMP

When George reached the rear of the tent he saw a crouching figure there. A hole had been cut in the cloth, and the fellow was gazing into the tent. He was dressed in woodsman's attire, leather jacket and leggins and fur cap. The gold rings in his ears quivered and glistened as the light of the fire struck them.

As George rounded the tent the spy turned and ran for the forest. Without a thought as to the ultimate result, George followed along behind. For some distance the lad kept pace with the mysterious visitor, but, of course, it was impossible for him to do so for any great length of time, as the fugitive was well versed in woodcraft, while George was not.

After a time George lost sight of the fellow entirely, but could still keep track of him by the noise he made in passing through the thicket. It was quite evident that the intruder now believed that pursuit had entirely ceased, for he made his way more leisurely through the swampy growth, and seemed to pay no attention whatever to the sounds of his passage.

Using great caution, the boy finally gained the hummock and stood looking at the dark bulk of a log cabin which stood in the center. He listened for a long time but all was silent inside. Presently he circled the place and came to a small opening which

was more like a loop-hole than a window. There was a glass pane here, and through it he saw that there was a fire on the inside.

By this time the lad was shivering with cold, not having taken the time to provide himself with heavy clothing before leaving the camp in pursuit of the spy. As he glanced through the glazed opening he saw a great fire of logs blazing in a rudely made fireplace at one end of the room. He moved on until he found a door.

"Perhaps the owner of this log mansion will think I'm pretty prompt in returning his call," the lad mused as he knocked softly at the door. "But, all the same, I'm going to give him the pleasure of my company until I can get warm."

There was no response to the knock, and so George opened the door and entered. There was no one in front of the fire; no one in any of the rude chairs. The boy stood looking about the room for a moment and then walked back to three bunks fastened against the wall, one above the other.

When he reached the front of the sleeping places an exclamation of alarm came from a bundle of furs and blankets on the lower bunk and a boy's frightened face gazed up at him. The boy sat observing the other with evident suspicion for a moment, until his eyes caught sight of the Boy Scout medals which adorned the sleeve of the lad's coat.

Then he extended an arm in the full salute of the Boy Scouts of America, and sat back with a grin on his face to note the result.

"Beaver Patrol, Chicago," he said directly.

"I know you," George said with an exclamation of surprise. "You're Thede Carson, and you're

about the toughtest little wharf rat in Chicago!"

"That's a nice recommend for a patrol leader to give one of his scouts," grinned the boy. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"The last time I saw you," George said, smiling at the memory, "you were diving into the South Branch to keep out of sight of a police boat."

"I remember that," grinned Thede. "They said I'd been swiping bananas up in Gambler's alley, and that wasn't true."

"Well, how in the name of all the seven wonders of the world did you get into the Hudson Bay country?" demanded George.

"Old Finklebaum," answered Thede.

"Old Finklebaum?" repeated George. "Do you mean the old Shylock who does business under the three balls down on State street? You can't mean that he had anything to do with your appearance here?"

"You bet he did have something to do with my being here!" Thede insisted. "You see, it's just this way: Old Finklebaum says to me one day, 'I'll take the hair off Ikey's head for selling that Little Brass God!'"

George gave a quick start of surprise at the mention of the very article the Boy Scouts had come to the Hudson Bay country in quest of, but checked himself in a second.

"What did he have a—a—what did you say it was?—if he didn't want to sell it?" asked the boy in assumed surprise.

"He did want to sell it up to that very day," was the reply, "but no one wanted to buy it. Then a man came into the shop and said he'd give a thou-

sand dollars for it on sight. So Finklebaum, having the Little Brass God within a foot of his hawkbill nose, takes the man's address and says he'll let him know if he hears anything about the thing in demand. Finklebaum thinks that if the man'll pay one thousand dollars for it, he'll pay five, and that's why he loses out."

George's interest was now so intense that the boy ceased speaking and sat regarding him steadily for a moment.

"What do you know about the Little Brass God?" he demanded.

"Nothing," replied George. "Never saw it!"

"Seems to me you're pretty much interested in it, though," commented the boy, rising from the bunk and taking a seat before the fire.

"I was thinking about Old Finklebaum cheating himself by getting too gay," answered George. "Go on, and tell me about it!"

"So when this man who offers the thousand dollars leaves the shop," Thede continued, "Finklebaum chases out to a dealer in antiques to make inquiries about the Little Brass God. I guess he thinks it's some East India idol, or something of that kind, and that his fortune is made."

"Supposing it should be an East India idol!" exclaimed George.

"It may be, for all I know," Thede replied. "Anyhow, while old Finklebaum was out trying to find out how much his Little Brass God was worth, little Ikey sold it for a ten dollar note."

"Oh my, oh my, oh my!" laughed George. "I'll bet there was a merry old time when Finklebaum re-

turned and found the ten dollar note in the drawer and the Little Brass God gone."

"Such a racket as never was!" declared Thede, laughing at the recollection of the scene. "I was in the shop," he went on, "getting out some articles Mother Murphy had been borrowing money on, and heard all that took place."

"Go on and tell me about it."

"Old Finklebaum said he was just plumb ruined. He said he'd snatch Ikey bald-headed, and do a lot of other things to him, if he didn't walk right out into State street and bring back that Little Brass God. Holy Moses! You ought to have seen how scared Little Ikey was!"

"Could he describe the man who bought the Little Brass God?" inquired George in a tone intended to be indifferent.

"Oh, yes!" replied Thede. "Ikey said the man wore a leather jacket with a red belt around the waist, a fur cap and rings in his ears. So Ikey was sent out to find the fellow, and I asked Old Finklebaum what he'd give me if I'd bring back the Little Brass God. He says he'll give me a hundred dollars the minute I put it in his hands, and I ducked down State street in search of this gink with the rings in his ears."

"And didn't find him?"

"If I had you wouldn't find me up here in this beastly country," replied Thede. "That is," the boy went on, "if I had found him with the Little Brass God in his possession."

"So you really did find him?" questioned George.

"Yes, I ran across him in a saloon down near

Twelfth street, and stuck to him like a bulldog to a cat's back for two days and nights."

"Why didn't you go and tell Finklebaum where he was, and let him do the watching? That's what you should have done!"

"Not for mine!" answered the other. "Old Finklebaum would have taken the case out of my hands, and fooled me out of my hundred simoleons. I follows this gink around until he becomes sociable and sort of adopts me. I gets into his furnished room down on Eldridge court and searches it during his absence. There ain't no Little Brass God there!"

"Did you ever get your eyes on it?" asked George.

"Never!" was the reply. "But he acts funny all the time, and I think he's got it hidden. When he gets ready to come back to the Hudson Bay country, he asks me how I'd like to come up north with him and learn to be a trapper, so I says that if there's anything on earth I want to be it's a trapper, and I come up here, making him think I'm after fur, when all the time I'm after the Little Brass God."

"Are you sure the man you followed is the man who brought the toy?" asked George. "You might have picked up the wrong man, you know."

"No I didn't!" replied Theode. "I've heard this man, Pierre, muttering and talking in his sleep, and I know he has the Little Brass God hidden. I'll go back to Chicago some day with it in my possession and Old Finklebaum will pay me a couple of thousand or he'll never get hold of it again! Won't it be a great story to tell the boys on State street about the times I'm having up here.

The door opened and Pierre entered, anger flashing from his eyes.

Chapter IV

LOST IN THE STORM

"What you do here?" demanded Pierre, standing with his back against the door and facing George with a snarl of hate and suspicion.

"I got lost!" was the quick reply.

"You go 'way!" shouted the trapper.

"Aw, what's the matter with letting him stay here all night?" asked Thede. "These boys are hunting and fishing, and the kid got lost in the swamp. He's all right!"

"He follow me!" insisted Pierre.

"Sure, I did!" George replied, trying to give the impression that the matter was rather a good joke on himself. "I heard you smashing through the bushes and I thought you were some kind of a wild animal, and so I followed you up. I got so far away from camp that I couldn't find my way back. Then I saw your light and came here."

"Where your gun." demanded Pierre, pointing suspiciously to the boy's empty hands. "You no shoot without gun!"

George drew an automatic from his pocket and held it up in the firelight. Pierre eyed it enviously.

"We hunt with these things!" the boy said.

Pierre continued to regard the boy with suspicion, for a long time but he finally seated himself before the fire and began to grumble because Thede had not been more active in the preparations for supper.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't come home and get supper yourself once in a while!" exclaimed the boy. "You needn't think I came up here in the cold to wait on you, Old Hoss!" the lad added with a wink at George. "I didn't leave my happy home for any such menial service."

Pierre grumbled out a few sentences in mongrel French and proceeded to prepare a solitary meal. Thede winked at George and began cooking enough supper for both of them.

George was thinking fast while the boy was sweating before the scorching heat of the fire. He was wondering whether Thede had told him the exact truth concerning his connection with Pierre. He was wondering, too, whether the boy had told all he knew of the Little Brass God.

Here were two parties in the Northern wilderness in quest of the same thing! It occurred to the wondering boy that Pierre might have been sent into the Hudson Bay country in quest of the individual who had purchased the Little Brass God at the pawnbroker's shop.

This, he argued, would be just about what Finklebaum would be likely to do. On the discovery of his loss, he would naturally seek some one familiar with the northern country and dispatch them in quest of the lost prize. In case this should prove to be the fact, the boy Thede might not have been taken into the confidence of the two men.

He might be telling what he believed to be the truth concerning the matter. The advantages to the pawnbroker of this secret arrangement would be many. In the first place, anyone following Pierre would naturally suppose him to be the person having

possession of the Little Brass God. This would naturally cause investigators to entirely lose sight of the real possessor in shadowing the man sent out to recover the article.

Another point which the boy considered was the possibility of the Little Brass God having been robbed of his treasure before being placed in the pawnshop. This idea, however, he soon rejected for the reason that no one would know better than the man who inspired the larceny whether the will was still retained in the cavity of the toy. Had he secured the document, he would be the last one to offer a high reward for the return of the odd casket in which it had been contained.

While the boy puzzled over the case, Pierre and Thede sat down to their evening meal. George was invited to join them in the repast, but declined on the ground that he had eaten supper not long before. After the meal was over, Pierre took up his rifle and left the cabin, scowling at George over his shoulder as he took his departure.

"He's pretty sore about your being here," grinned Thede.

"I don't know why he should be."

"Perhaps he thinks you've come up here to steal his Little Brass God."

The boy was very anxious to get back to his chums in order that the situation might be thoroughly discussed. They were in the Hudson Bay country in quest of the Little Brass God, and here was Thede on the same mission. It seemed to him that if Pierre had really had the toy in his possession, Thede would have caught sight of it, at least.

The more he thought of this phase of the case,

the more he was inclined to believe that Pierre was also in search of the Little Brass God.

"Pierre will be apt to raise a howl if I leave the cabin alone," the boy finally said. "He's fierce when he gets mad!"

"You don't seem to be afraid of him," replied George.

"I'm afraid of him all rig' " the other replied, "but I don't intend to let him know it. I've got one of these billies inside my coat, all the time, and if he tries any funny business with me I'll knock his block off!"

"He could cut you into shoestrings while you are asleep!"

"Yes, I suppose so, but he won't do anything of the kind!"

"Well, come on over to camp," urged George. "It isn't so very much of a walk. I guess we can make it in half an hour."

Thede hesitated, but finally dressed himself for a cold journey, and fixed the fire so that no damage might be done by it during his absence.

"How long has Pierre lived in this cabin?" asked George, as the boys started out. "It looks like an old building."

"I guess he found it standing here deserted and just moved in," was the reply. "I don't think he knows much about this country."

"Do you think he has any idea that the Little Brass God is in such great demand?" asked George.

"No, I don't think he has."

"Then, why should he keep it hidden away, even from you, three hundred miles away from civilization? I should think he'd want to have the thing

out once in a while, just to take a look at it, anyway."

"I should think so," agreed Thede.

The boys made their way over the morass and entered the thick undergrowth. Now and then George flashed his electric, but he did not keep it burning steadily for the reason that he did not care to have Pierre trailing them back to the camp.

"Are you sure you passed this way when you came to the cabin?" asked Thede as they walked along. "I don't seem to find any trail here."

"It seems to me I came along here," was the reply. "If it wasn't so blasted dark, we could tell whether we were going in the right direction or not, all right!"

As the boy spoke, he lifted a hand to his face and raised the net which protected his features from the mosquitos, still flying about, although the night, apparently, was cold enough to freeze their wings stiff.

"They won't bother you much more," Thede commented.

"How do you know that?"

"Because there's a snow storm coming up!"

"Then we'd better be getting a move on!" advised George. "If we get caught up here in a snow storm, it'll be 'Good-night' for us!"

"We're going as fast as we can," replied Thede, "but I don't know whether we're going in the right direction or not. It seems like we've walked far enough to be at the camp."

In five minutes the searchlight revealed a drift of snow in the air, and ten minutes later the ground was white. A cold wind blew out of the north, shift-

ing at times to the west, and the boys shivered under the chill of it. Still no welcome light from the camp.

"Can you find your way back to the cabin?" asked George after they had walked at least an hour.

"We've got to find our way somewhere pretty soon!" the other replied. "If we don't, we'll freeze to death!"

The boys walked for what seemed to them two hours more, and then Thede, who was in advance, stumbled over a tree bole lying at the foot of a gentle slope. He rose rubbing his elbow and turned the flashlight toward the front.

"I know where we are now," he said. "We're about eight miles from the cabin. This place here is called Bear Ridge, and it's about the only collection of rocks and caverns that I know of in this district."

"Can't we find a cavern to crawl into?" asked George, his teeth chattering with the cold.

"If we find a cavern," advised Thede, "we're likely to find a couple of bears packed away in it!"

"I don't care if there are a hundred bears!" grumbled George. "I'll freeze to death if I stay out in this snow another minute!"

After a long and difficult climb the boys came to a ledge of rock and crawled into a small opening revealed by the searchlight.

"The beds are all full tonight, I guess," George said shivering. "I hear Bruin kicking about being disturbed."

Chapter V

A BOY SCOUT TRICK

"Where's that fool boy going now?" asked Tommy as George, in pursuit of the spy, dashed into the thicket.

"What did he see back here that caused him to let out a yell like that?" asked Sandy.

"I don't believe he saw anything!" Will declared. "He just thought he'd give us a good scare by pretending he'd bumped into a band of Indians, or something like that."

The boys looked over the ground in the rear of the tent, and finally Tommy came to the place where the spy had punctured the canvas.

"Who made this hole in the tent?" he asked.

The boys gathered around the opening through which the spy had inspected the interior of the tent, and looked at each other with wonder expressed on their faces. Tommy was first to speak.

"George must have caught a man here looking in," he said.

"That's why he disappeared so suddenly," Will argued.

"Yes, he was chasing the Peeping Tom," Sandy agreed.

"I wish we knew the direction they took," Will mused. "The boy may get into serious trouble, chasing off into the forest along in the night. He should have told us of his discovery so one of us

could have gone with him! We may be able to find him yet."

"Aw, he'll come back before long!" Tommy argued. "He can't make any headway out there in the underbrush, and the fellow who was here will probably run away from him before he gets three rods from the tent."

"I hope so!" answered Will.

"But what was that gink prowling around the tent for?" asked Sandy. "That must have been the same fellow we heard using the paddle a short time ago. If it is, he's mighty liberal with his bullets!"

"I'm anxious about that boy," Will broke in. "I wish he'd come back!"

"Yes, this isn't a very desirable country to be lost in in the night!" Tommy admitted. "He ought not to have gone away."

"What do you make of this gink prowling around our tent?" asked Sandy. "Do you think he's doing it out of curiosity, or because he has an inkling of what we're up here after?"

"Huh! How would any one away off up here know anything about the Little Brass God?" demanded Tommy.

"Look here," Will argued. "The Little Brass God is stolen from this house on Drexel Boulevard. Enclosed in a cavity in the toy is a will disposing of several million dollars worth of property. The Little Brass God is finally sold to a pawn-broker, who in turn disposes of it to a trapper known to belong in the Hudson Bay district."

"That's a fair statement," answered Tommy.

"Now, Mr. Horton, attorney for the man who is in quest of the lost will, and Sigsbee, the man inter-

ested in probating the previous will, both know of the final disposition of the Little Brass God. At least, Frederick Tupper knows that it was taken from the pawn shop by a Hudson Bay trapper, and it is believed that Sigsbee possesses the same information."

"Of course, they both know about it," agreed Sandy.

"Now, why shouldn't they both send people up here in quest of the Little Brass God?" Will continued.

"But suppose this man Sigsbee doesn't know anything about the will being in the belly of the Little Brass God?" suggested Tommy.

"We believe he does know all about it!" said Will.

"And do you believe, too, that he hired a burglar to go and steal the Little Brass God?" asked Sandy.

"As I said before," Will answered, "we don't know anything about that. The Little Brass God may have been taken by a burglar who was simply in quest of plunder. The whole thing resolves itself into this: If the really, truly burglar stole the toy and sold it to the pawn-broker, the will is in the ugly little chap's belly. If Sigsbee hired the burglar he took the will out before the trinket was sold at the pawn-shop. In that case, he would be the last one to send an expedition up here to retrieve the toy. And so you see," Will continued, "that we don't know anything about it."

"Well it's funny that gink should come prowling around our tents on the first night of our arrival!" Tommy exclaimed. "According to all accounts, he should have come sneaking into camp looking for a drink of brandy. The fact that he ran away when

discovered shows that he wasn't here for any honest purpose."

"Well, what are we going to do?" demanded Sandy. "Let's give the Little Brass God a rest long enough to make up our minds about George."

"We can't do anything until morning," Will interposed.

"How do you know we can't?" demanded Tommy.

"Because it's dark, and because we know nothing about the country," replied Will.

The boys sat before the fire until midnight listening for the return of their chum. When it began to snow they reluctantly decided that George had crawled into some temporary shelter for the night and would not think of trying to make his way home through the storm.

"You boys go to bed now," Will advised, "and I'll sit up and keep watch. If you hear me firing now and then, don't think the camp's been attacked. George may be lost in the woods, and I'll be doing that to give him the right direction."

"We should have done that before," Tommy suggested.

"Well, get to bed," Will urged, "and I'll run the camp till morning."

Tommy and Sandy crawled into the tent which stood nearest to the great campfire and cuddled up in the warm blankets.

"Do you believe Will will stay in camp until morning?" asked Tommy.

"Of course I don't," was the reply. "He'll wait until we're asleep, and then he'll go prowling around the camp in search of George."

"That's just about what he'll do."

"What's your idea, then?" asked Sandy.

"Well," Tommy whispered, "George may be out in the snow somewhere, and it won't take us very long to circle about the camp, just to make sure."

"I got you!" replied Sandy. "We'll get out under the back wall, and take a little trip with our search-lights."

Half an hour later, when Will, heavily wrapped, glanced in at the tent preparatory to going out on his quiet search for the missing chum, he saw that the blankets were empty.

"The little scamps!" he chuckled. "They've beaten me to it!"

In the meantime, Tommy and Sandy were making their way through the wilderness traveling in the narrow light provided by the electrics. By this time the snow was quite deep, and the wind appeared to be rising every minute.

"We never can get home in this storm if we once lose sight of the campfire," Tommy said as the two huddled together in the lee of a big tree.

"That's a fact!" Sandy admitted. "So I guess we'd better be poking along. Which way is the fire?"

"Why, it ought to be right over there!" replied Tommy doubtfully.

"Over where?" demanded Sandy, with a note of alarm in his voice.

"Blessed if I know!" declared Tommy, sitting flat down in the snow.

The boys walked round and round the tree and made little excursions in every direction without getting a single trace of the campfire.

"I guess we've gone and done it now!" Tommy grunted.

"Aw, we can find our way back all right enough!" Sandy declared. "We came north when we left the camp, didn't we?"

"Guess we did," replied Tommy, his teeth rattling with the cold.

"Then all we've got to do is to follow the wind and we'll strike the tents. That's some Boy Scout forestry sense, isn't it?"

"We'll wait until we see whether it brings us back to camp or not," replied Tommy. "If it does, it's all right; if it doesn't, it's all wrong."

Had the boys proceeded straight north on leaving the camp, they would have doubtless returned to the lighted zone by keeping with the wind, if the wind had not shifted to the west soon after their departure from the camp.

They walked for what seemed to them to be hours. In fact, more than once they glanced about hoping to get their direction from a showing of daylight in the sky.

"I don't believe it ever will be daylight again," grumbled Sandy, "and I move we stop right here and build a big fire."

"Can we build a fire in all this ruck?" asked Tommy.

"You bet we can!" was the answer. "What are we Boy Scouts good for if we can't build a fire in a storm?"

They cleared a little space in the snow and Tommy brought a handful of dry bark. Shielding the flickering blaze as much as possible, the boy applied the match he had struck to the bark. The

fire which resulted could have been started in a teacup.

About this he built a skeleton tent of bits of dry soft wood from six to nine inches in length. His fire was now as large as an ordinary kettle. Next, the boys threw larger boughs on the blaze, and finally succeeded in surrounding it by large logs.

"There's one thing about it," Tommy declared as they warmed their hands over the blaze, "there won't any wild animals take a bite out of us as long as we keep near this fire!"

"I wish George would come poking along in," Sandy commented. "I believe I'll go out in the thicket after I get warm and see if he isn't somewhere in this vicinity. I thought I heard a call over there just a moment ago."

"Listen, then," Tommy advised. "If some one called, we're likely to hear a repetition of the sound."

Sure enough, the call came again as the boys huddled over the fire. It came down with the wind and seemed to be rapidly drawing nearer.

"That sounds to me like a boy's voice," Sandy suggested.

"Sounds more like a half-breed to me!" Tommy answered.

"He's stopped coming on, anyway," Sandy exclaimed in a moment.

"Perhaps he's tumbled down in the snow!" Tommy argued.

"In that case, we'd better be getting out where he is," said Sandy.

The boys both left the fire and darted out into the darkness, listening for the call but hearing only the roaring of the wi l

Chapter VI

THE CAVE OF THE TWO BEARS

"Bears?" exclaimed George, as the lads listened in front of the cave, "do you think there are polar bears up here? I think it's cold enough for the big white variety."

"Put your head inside the cave," Thede suggested, "and you won't be wondering whether there are any bears here."

George did as requested, and soon the warm animal odor noticeable in the various zoos of the country attacked his nostrils.

"What kind of bears are they?" he asked.

"I've heard Pierre say there were black and brown bears," replied Thede. "You know I haven't been in here only a few days."

"I wonder if they'll bite."

"Stick your arm in there and find out," Thede answered.

"I don't believe they'll jump on us if we keep our light going," George argued. "Anyway," he went on, "we've got to get somewhere out of this wind and snow. If we don't, we'll freeze to death!"

Very slowly and cautiously the boys made their way into the cavern. It was a small place, not more than six feet in width and twice that in depth, and the electric revealed about all there was inside.

Two black huddles of fur showed under the finger of light, and as the boys crept on, George with his

automatic ready for use, two pair of surly, pig-like eyes became visible.

The animals stirred restlessly as the boys advanced and finally began edging toward one side of the cave, as if seeking a way out.

"Get out of the entrance," advised George as soon as both animals were on their feet, "and we'll give them a chance to escape."

This plan was followed, and, much to the delight of the youngsters, the animals sprang outside and for a moment disappeared in the darkness.

"It's a shame to turn the poor creatures out in this storm!" George declared. "Perhaps they were just entering upon their long winter's sleep."

"We didn't order them out!" grinned Thede.

"It amounts to the same thing," George responded. "They've gone away, and are likely to freeze to death."

"If you think they've gone away," Thede replied, "just turn your light toward the entrance. They're not going to give up their warm nest without a scrap, and I can't say that I blame them for it."

It was considerably warmer in the cave and, out of the tempest, the boys were quite comfortable in their thick clothing. They huddled together at the far end of the cavern, and George kept the light turned on the two bears, who were now growling savagely.

"Why don't you shoot?" asked Thede.

"What's the use of shooting until I have to?" demanded George. "They can come in here if they want to, if they'll only behave themselves."

"If they try to come in here," declared Thede, "I'll go up in the air about nine hundred feet."

Although they did not attempt to re-enter the cavern, the bears kept close to the entrance. It was clear that only the light of the electric kept them from attacking the boys.

"They'll stay right there till morning," exclaimed Thede, "and we'll have to shoot them anyway before we can get out. They are kicking themselves now," he continued with a grin, "because they let us in here without a battle. I wish we understood bear talk so that we could learn what they're saying to each other.

"Nothing very complimentary to us," George declared.

As the night advanced it grew colder and the boys moved about in quest of a more sheltered corner. They could still hear the bears moving about outside, but paid no attention to them.

"Look here," George said presently, as the searchlight rested for a moment on a break in the rock. "I wouldn't wonder at all if we could get further under the hill. There's an opening here which looks wide enough for us to crawl through."

"It's a wonder the bears didn't find it then, "commented Thede.

"I'm going to see whether I can get through it or not," George insisted. "It may be a warmer corner. Anyway, it'll give us exercise, and that's what we need about this time."

Throwing the spear of light into the crevice, the boy glanced keenly about. The walls of the opening seemed to be smooth, and to extend only a short distance. Just below where the walls broke he could see the brown floor of another cavern."

"I guess it's all right," he said to Thede. "You

take the light and hold it down and I'll scramble in. May as well break my neck as to freeze to death."

"Let me take your hand, then," advised Thede, "so you can be pulled back if you don't like the looks of the new furnished room."

"I'd like to be in a furnished room on Washington boulevard just this minute," George broke in.

"I wouldn't mind a good box in Gamblers' alley," said Thede.

When all was ready Thede gave one hand to George and lowered him down to the full length of both arms.

"All right!" George cried in a moment, "I can feel my toes touching the rock. Let go! You drop down now, and I'll steady you when you light."

Both boys were soon in the lower cavern and a moment following their arrival there, they heard the claws of the bears rattling on the rocks above.

"I've heard Pierre tell about caves in this range of hills," Thede said, "but I never knew that they had caves two stories high."

As the boy ceased speaking, George suddenly shut off his flash light and laid a hand on the other's arm.

"What's that for——"

"Keep still!" whispered George. "Do you see anything?"

"Looks to me like a light," the other replied.

"Looks like a fire, doesn't it?" asked George.

"It certainly is a fire and there's a man sitting in front of it."

The fire showed at the end of a narrow passage, perhaps ten or twelve yards away. It was blazing vigorously, and the cavern in which it stood was well clouded with smoke. It was evident that the

watcher by the fire was as yet unconscious of the approach of the two boys.

"I wish we could get to that fire!" George said with a shiver.

"And why not?"

"I don't think he'd be hiding here if he was keeping open house," replied George. "He may be an outlaw hiding from the police. And in that case he wouldn't relish the idea of his underground retreat being discovered, even by two boys who want to get warm.

"Anyway," Thede insisted, "I'm going to crawl up close and see what I can find out. That fire looks good to me."

The boys advanced cautiously, with George a little in advance. The man at the fire sat with his chin on his breast as if in sound sleep.

"I don't believe he'd say anything if we walked right in on him," Thede declared. "If he does, we can hold a gun on him and invite him to a more friendly mood."

The man did not move as the boys came on, and George was about to call out to him when Thede caught him by the shoulder.

"Don't you dare make a motion!" the boy whispered. "Stand still where you are and look to the little shelf of rock on the other side of the fire.

George looked, and his automatic and his searchlight almost clattered to the floor as his eyes rested on something which glittered like gold in the red light of the fire. He turned to Thede, and there was a tremor in his voice as he whispered in his ear.

"Do you know what that is?" he asked.

"I think I know what it is!" was the whispered reply.

"It's the Little Brass God!" whispered George excitedly. "And I'm going to sneak over there and lay my hands on it before that fellow wakes up!"

"You never can do it!" advised Thede.

"I've just got to do it!"

"If that is the real Little Brass God, how did it ever get here?" whispered Thede. "Strangest thing I ever heard of."

"Gee whiz!" whispered George. "We mustn't stand around wondering how it got here. The thing for us to do right now is to get possession of it. I believe I can get over there without waking that fellow up."

"Let me take your gun, then," Thede advised, "and if he moves or makes any funny breaks, I'll keep him under cover!"

George handed his gun over to the boy without a word and moved on toward the fire. It was clear that the man was asleep, his chin resting on his breast, his shoulders supported by a wall of rock.

The thing which glittered on the ledge, now almost within reaching distance, was unquestionably the Little Brass God, the quest of which had brought the boys into the Hudson Bay country.

George had never set eyes on the toy, but there was no mistaking the crossed legs, the folded arms, the paunchy stomach, and the misshapen, leering face. The boy heard a soft warning whispered from the opposite side of the room and turned his eyes from a greedy contemplation of the Little Brass God to the figure of the man crouching before the blaze.

The fellow had lifted his head, and now sat staring

at the boy with a dumb wonder in his eyes. While the boy looked the expression changed from wonder to alarm, from alarm to anger, and then the doubled-up figure straightened and sprang forward.

The boy heard a pistol shot, sensed the acrid smell of powder smoke, felt a muscular hand grasp the wrist which was extended toward the shelf of rock, and then a million stars seemed to be falling from the heavens. There was a roar as of an ocean beating against breakers, and then a lull during which he heard another pistol shot.

When the boy regained consciousness, daylight was creeping into the cavern through an opening much lower down than the one by which the boys had entered the upper cavern.

The earth outside was covered with a thick mat of snow, and the trees and shrubs of the forest were bending beneath burdens of pure white.

The fire had burned to ashes and it was miserably cold.

The Little Brass God was gone!

Chapter VII

AN EMPTY CAVERN

Perhaps a dozen yards from the fire, Tommy stumbled at a figure over which the falling snow was fast drifting. He called out to Sandy, who was only a short distance away, and the two lifted the unconscious form in their arms and staggered toward the fire.

"Why, it's nothing but a kid!" Sandy exclaimed.

"Don't you know who it is?" demanded Tommy.

"Never saw him before!" was the reply.

"It's Thede Carson!"

"Not that little monkey of a Thede Carson who's always getting the Beaver Patrol into trouble?" demanded Sandy. "What would he be doing up here? I guess you're losing the sense of sight."

"Sure, it's Thede Carson," insisted Tommy.

"Well, I guess he's about all in," Sandy volunteered.

"Get busy then, with your first aid," Tommy ordered. "Get some of his clothes off and get to work with snow, or his fingers and toes will drop off as soon as they thaw out."

"I don't believe it's the cold so much as it is exhaustion," Sandy ventured. "He seems to have been running a whole lot, for he's still panting. I reckon he just dropped down when he couldn't run any further."

"I guess that's about right," Tommy admitted.

"He doesn't seem to be very cold. It may be that wound on his head," the lad added, pointing to a long gash in the scalp which, judging from the state of the lad's clothing, had bled very freely.

"What do you think of coming away up here in the Hudson Bay country and picking a member of the Beaver Patrol right out of the woods?" demanded Sandy. "We seem to find Boy Scouts wherever we go."

The boys worked over the exhausted lad some moments, and then he opened his eyes.

"Now for the love of Mike!" exclaimed Tommy, "don't look around and say 'Where am I?' The correct thing to say in these modern days is 'Vot iss?' Do you get me, Thede?"

"Why, it's Tommy!" said the boy.

"Betcher life!" returned Tommy. "Did you run all the way up here from Clark street? Or did you come up in an aeroplane?"

Thede sat up and looked about for the tents and the boats.

"Why, this isn't the camp!" he said.

"We haven't got any more camp than a rabbit!" declared Sandy. "We're lost! We've got to wait till morning to find our way back."

"It's a good thing you're lost!" exclaimed Thede. "I don't think I could have held out until I reached the camp. You see," he went on with a slight shudder at the recollection of his experiences, "I left George a long distance off."

"Left George?" repeated Tommy.

"I couldn't bring him with me," answered Thede, with a slow smile.

"Where did you leave him?" demanded Tommy.

"Why didn't he come with you?" asked Sandy.

"Because," replied Thede, "just as he was reaching up to the wall of the cavern to take hold of the Little Brass God, he got a tunk on the coco that put him out for the count."

"What do you know about the Little Brass God?" asked Tommy.

"I've seen it!" answered Thede. "It sat up on a shelf on the face of the wall, with its legs crossed, and its arms folded, and its wicked face telling me where I could go whether I wanted to or not."

"I guess something's gone to your head!" declared Sandy.

"But I'll tell you we found the Little Brass God!" declared Thede. "George came to the cabin, and we started out to find the camp, and got lost in the storm, and brought up in a cave inhabited by two bears."

Sandy regarded Tommy significantly.

"And we found a basement floor to the cavern, and went down the elevator and found a man asleep in front of a fire with the Little Brass God winking at him. Funny fellow, that Little Brass God!"

"You for the foolish house!" cried Tommy.

"Honest, boys!" Thede declared. "George came to the cabin and I started home with him after Pierre left us alone together. The storm chased us into a cave, just as I told you, and we kept on going until we came to the place where the Little Brass God sat up on the wall making faces at a man asleep at the fire."

"Go on!" exclaimed Tommy, at last understanding that the boy was in his right mind. "Tell us about it!"

"And George said he would get the Little Brass God without waking the man up. So he gave me his gun, and I was to shoot in case the man made any trouble. Then, just as George was reaching for the Little Brass God, the man woke up and shot at him. Then the man shot at me, and I shot at him, and then he got my gun away from me and I ran out to find you."

"And you left George there in the cavern?" asked Sandy.

"I just had to!" was the reply. "I couldn't do anything with that giant of a half-breed, and I didn't have a gun and so I ducked.

"Can you take us back to that cavern now?" asked Tommy.

"Sure I can," was the reply.

"Oughtn't we to let Will know where we are?" asked Sandy.

Tommy looked at Thede questioningly.

"Can you tell us how to find the cavern?" he asked in a moment.

"What for?" demanded the boy. "I'm going to take you where it is."

"You're about all in," declared Sandy, "and you ought to go to camp and rest up and tell Will where we've gone."

"You couldn't find this cave in a thousand years," declared Thede.

While the boys talked the wind died down, and the snow ceased falling.

Presently a mist of daylight crept into the forest and then the boys crept out on their journey toward the ridge of hills.

"Wasn't that a dream about your seeing the

Little Brass God?" asked Tommy as they walked along.

"Sure not," was the reply, "we both saw it, didn't we?"

"Well, whoever told you anything about the Little Brass God?" demanded Sandy. "How did you know there was a Brass God?"

"Old Finklebaum told me. He said he'd give me a hundred dollars if I found it, so I started in to earn that mazuma."

In as few words as possible the boy repeated the story he had told George on the previous evening.

"I guess you boys came up here looking for the Little Brass God, too, didn't you?" the boy asked, shrewdly, after a moment's hesitation."

"We came up to hunt and fish!" laughed Tommy.

"To hunt for the Little Brass God and fish for the man who bought it of the pawnbroker, I guess," laughed Thede. "You boys never came clear up here just to chase through the snow after game when there's plenty of shooting three hundred miles to the south."

"You say you think that Pierre is the man who bought the Little Brass God of the pawnbroker?" asked Sandy, as the boys stopped for a moment to rest. "Is that the reason you followed him here?"

"That's the reason!" was the reply.

"He seemed perfectly willing to have you come?"

"He welcomed me like a long lost brother!"

"Then it's a hundred to one shot Pierre never got his hands on the Little Brass God! Don't you see how suspicious he would have been if he had had the little brute in his possession?"

"I didn't think of that!" replied Thede. "Look

here," the boy continued, "I'd like to know what all this fuss is about, anyway. Why should any one in his right mind give old Finklebaum a thousand dollars or five thousand dollars, for that piece of brass? That's what gets me!"

Tommy and Sandy looked at each other significantly but made no immediate reply. In a moment Thede went on.

" 'Spose this should be a Little Brass God stolen from some temple away out in the wilds of India. Suppose a delegation of East Indians should be sent here to get it. Wouldn't they murder a score of men if they had to in order to get possession of it?"

"They probably would," was the reply.

After an hour's hard walking, the boys came to the foot of the ridge of hills and looked upward. Thede pointed to the cavern where the two bears had been discovered.

"There's where we went in," he explained, "but the cavern where the fire and the Little Brass God were is right under that one."

"How're we going to get to it?"

"If you want to take your chance on meeting the bears, you can drop down through the opening from the floor above."

"But isn't there an opening to this lower cavern?"

"Sure there is! That's the one I ran out of! Say," he continued, "that's the one we saw the man by the fire run out of, too. You can see the tracks of his moccasins in the snow. He must have left after the storm ceased. My tracks were filled."

"In we go, then!" cried Tommy, advancing up the slight slope to the lip of the cavern.

"Watch out for bears!" cried Thede.

Chapter VIII

A TRAPPER'S TREACHERY

When Will, watching at the camp, found that Tommy and Sandy had disappeared, he had no idea that they would remain more than an hour or so.

The long night passed, however, and the boys did not return. When daylight came, Will built up a roaring fire and began preparing breakfast.

It was his idea at that time that the boys had come together in the forest about the time the snow began falling, and had sought in some deserted shack temporary protection from the storm.

"They'll be back here in a short time, hungry as bears!" he thought.

Presently he heard some one advancing through the snow-covered thicket, and turned in that direction with an expectant smile.

Instead of his chums he saw a half-breed in leather jacket and leggins and a fur cap approaching. When the fellow reached the camp he made a quick and rather impertinent inspection of the tents before approaching the spot where the boy stood awaiting him.

"Good morning!" Will said, not without a challenge in his voice.

"Where are the boys?" asked the visitor.

"Who are you?" demanded Will.

"Pierre!" was the short reply.

"Why do you ask about the boys?"

Pierre explained in broken English that one of the boys who evidently belonged to the camp had coaxed his companion away.

"Who is your companion?" asked Will, "and why do you come here looking for him? Who was it that visited your cabin?"

Pierre laboriously explained what had taken place on the previous evening, and Will listened with an anxious face.

"And you left them there together, and when you returned they had disappeared? Is that what you mean to say?"

Pierre nodded.

"He coax my boy away," he said sullenly.

"Is this boy you speak of your son?" asked Will.

"Chicago boy!" was the reply.

"Why don't you go on and tell me all about the boy and about yourself?" inquired Will. "What's the use of standing there grunting and trying to make me understand nods and scowls?"

Pierre explained that he had been in Chicago to see the sights, had fallen in with Thede, and agreed to bring him into the forest with him. His explanation was not very clear as he talked more mongrel French than English, so Will was not very well informed at the end of the recital. Pierre looked suspicious as well as disappointed.

"Well," Will explained to the half-breed after a moment's deliberation, "I suppose you'll turn in now and help me find the boys!"

Pierre nodded and pointed toward the campfire.

"Build him big!" he said. "Boys come cold."

Accepting the hint, Will piled great logs on the fire while the half-breed looked sullenly on. The

boy then dressed himself in his warmest clothing and the two set out together.

"Have you any idea which way to go?" asked the boy.

Pierre pointed away to the south.

"Wind blow that way," he said. "They follow the wind."

Numerous times, as the two tramped through the snow together, Will caught the half-breed looking in his direction with eyes of hate.

After proceeding some distance, he fell in behind Pierre, and so the two traveled through the wilderness, each suspicious and watchful of the other. After walking an hour or more they came to a place where Tommy and Sandy had built their fire on the previous night.

There the half-breed read the story written upon the snow like a book. Pointing here and there, he explained to Will that two boys had been caught in the storm and had built a fire. He showed, too, that a third boy had come plunging through the snow, nearly circled the camp, and came back toward the fire from the north. Then he showed the tracks of three heading off to the south.

"Do you think one of those boys was your companion?" asked Will.

The half-breed answered that he was sure of it.

"Then that leaves one of the boys still unaccounted for," Will mused. "It looks to me," he went on, "as if your friend and George started away together and got lost. Then your boy came back and found Tommy and Sandy and started away with them toward the place where he had left George. Is that the way you look at it?"

The half-breed grunted some sullen reply, and the two walked on together following the trail which led toward the range of hills.

Instead of directly following the trail left by the boys, however, Pierre turned frequently to left and right, explaining that if enemies were about it was a trail which would be watched.

They came to the cavern at last, and stood by the dying embers of the fire. There was no one in sight. Will examined the sloping surface of snow in front and found no tracks leading outward.

"They must be in here somewhere!" he exclaimed.

Pierre nodded his fur cap vigorously, and the two began a careful examination of the underground place.

They found many little caves opening from the larger one, but no trace of the boys. After a time a shout from Pierre drew Will to his side. The fellow was peering into a crevice in the rocky wall which seemed to lead for some distance under the hill.

"Do you think they are hidden in there?" asked the boy.

Pierre explained in his barely understandable dialect that he thought the boys might have escaped into the inner cavern and started to make their way out in another direction.

"Then I'll go in after them," Will decided.

Before entering he called shrilly into the cavern, but only the echoes came back to him. By considerable squeezing, he managed to make his way through the opening. He then found himself in a passage-like place, sloping upward. As he threw his light about the interior, he heard a chuckle in the outer chamber where he had left Pierre.

He turned in time to see the half-breed rolling great stones against the mouth of the narrow opening by means of which he had entered.

"Hah!" sneered Pierre. "You bring me trouble!"

"What are you doing that for?" demanded Will.

The half-breed peered into the opening with eyes that resembled those of a snake, so full of malice and hatred were they.

"You steal my boy!" he said.

"So this is a trap, is it?" Will demanded.

The half-breed answered by a chuckle of laughter.

"If you don't take those stones away," Will threatened, "I'll fill you full of lead when I do get out!"

The half-breed patted his gun stock significantly, but made no reply.

The boy heard him rolling rocks along the cavern floor and against the opening, and turned away hoping to find some other means of egress.

It was clear to him that the half-breed thoroughly understood the situation in the hills. He had no doubt that he had planned to bring him there for the purpose which had developed. He understood, too, that if there were other openings to the cavern, Pierre knew where they were, and would block them as soon as he had effectually blocked the one by which entrance had been effected.

It was cold and damp in that undergroundplace, but the perspiration actually broke out on the boy's brow as he considered the fate which might await him in that dreary place of detention.

He had, of course, no means of knowing the whereabouts of any of his chums. In fact, it seemed to him possible that they, too, had been inveigled into a

trap similar to the one which had been set for himself.

The motive for this brutal action on the part of the half-breed was, of course, entirely unknown to the boy. It will be remembered that he knew nothing whatever of Thede's suspicions that Pierre actually had the Little Brass God in his possession.

It was black as ink in the passage, but the boy's flashlight had recently been supplied with a new battery, and he knew that it would not fail for many hours, so he walked along with confidence.

In perhaps a quarter of an hour the boy came to a blank wall. There appeared to be no way in which the journey could be extended under the hills. The nearest lateral passage was some distance back.

Realizing that no time should be lost, the lad hastened thither and advanced to the south end of the cross passage. Here, too, he came upon a blank wall. While he stood listening a heavy, rumbling voice came to his ears. There were either crevices in that rocky bulkhead or the wall was very thin.

Presently the heavy voice ceased speaking, and then a lighter tone was heard. At first Will could not distinguish the words used, but directly his heart almost bounded into his throat as he listened to Tommy's voice saying:

"I'll break your crust, you old stiff, if you come near me!"

So the boys were still in a position to defend themselves! Will beat frantically on the wall and threw his light hither and yon in search of some opening through which his voice might be heard.

Directly there came an answering sound from the other side.

Chapter IX

TWO HUNGRY BEARS

The Little Brass God was gone!

George, still lying upon the floor of the cavern, stretched his legs and arms, to see if he was all there, as he mentally commented.

After a time he arose to his feet, clinging desperately to the wall because of his weakness, and called to Thede, who, as the reader knows, had left hours before, in search of the injured lad's chums. There came only echoes in reply to his shouts.

There was a pile of wood near at hand and, gathering numerous dry fagots, the boy staggered dizzily toward the heap of ashes in the center of the cave. It seemed to him that the first thing to do was to get warm.

He was hungry, too, but warmth was the important thing just then. A few red coals still remained, and a blaze soon grew under the boy's careful hands. In a short time there was a roaring fire.

After thawing the chill out of his bones, the boy began looking around for his friend of the night before. He looked at his watch and noted that it was eight o'clock. His revolver was gone but his searchlight was still in his pocket.

He remembered in a moment that he had handed his revolver to Thede before starting to cross the light zone in the center of the cavern. Whatever had taken place during his hours of unconsciousness, it was evident that he had not been robbed.

It seemed to the boy, as he stood looking through the opening which gave a view of the forest to the north, that he had lain on the hard floor of the cavern for countless aeons. He did not remember what had caused the wound on his head. He only knew that he had been seized with a sudden dizziness and had fallen, after hearing pistol shots.

Standing before the fire with the cheerful light of the blaze on one side and the dazzling light of the sun on the snow on the other side, the uncanny incidents of the night before seemed like a dream to the boy.

He even found himself wondering whether he had actually caught sight of the Little Brass God, leering down upon the watcher from the wall.

Then he recollected that Thede had first called his attention to the ugly image whose evil eyes seemed to take on malevolent expressions in the light of the dancing flames.

"It must be all true, then," he concluded. "The man by the fire, the Little Brass God on the shelf, the pistol shots, and then a blank."

He wondered where Thede had gone, and why he had deserted him.

"That's the strangest part of it all," the lad mused. "I had an idea that the boy would stand by me if I got into trouble, and here he runs away, leaving me lying unconscious in the freezing atmosphere of this desolate old cavern. I didn't think it of him!"

It occurred to George as he studied over the puzzle that Thede might not have been as innocent and loyal as he had pretended to be. He might have been merely an instrument in the hands of a cunning man.

"At any rate," the boy pondered, "we have found the Little Brass God!"

He had not, of course, secured possession of it, but he had learned definitely that it was in that part of the country. He wondered as to the identity of the man who sat watching the fire. The light had been dim, and it might have been Pierre for all he knew. Or it might have been an accomplice of the tricky trapper.

"Now, I wonder how I'm going to get back to camp," the boy mused as he piled on more wood and spread his hands to the cheerful warmth of the fire. "Judging from the time it took us to get here, it must be ten or twelve miles back to the camp."

"The boys will think I've deserted them, I guess," he added. "If they knew how hungry I am just at this minute, they'd send out a relief expedition!"

While the boy warmed himself before the fire a series of growls came from the entrance to the cavern, and two black bears looked in upon him.

"Now I wonder if you're the same disreputable citizens that tried to make a free lunch counter of me last night?" George mused. "I presume you're hungry, all right, but I'd rather not be the person to do the feeding this morning. You look too fierce for me, both of you."

The smell of blood evidently excited the bears to unusual feats of courage, for they entered the mouth of the cavern and stood growling and showing their teeth within a short distance of where George stood.

Only for the great blaze which now leaped almost to the roof of the cavern, the boy would have been attacked at once. He glanced at the rapidly decreasing pile of wood, and wondered what would

take place as soon as the fire had died down. He had no weapon with which to defend himself.

For at least a quarter of an hour the bears and the lad gazed at each other through the red light of the fire. The bears were gradually moving forward, and every time the lad laid a stick of wood on the blaze they seemed to understand more fully that his defense was weakening.

George thought he had never seen wood burn away so fast. The blaze seemed to melt it as boiling water melts ice.

Already the blaze was dropping lower, and the pile of wood was almost gone. The bears sniffed at the blood stains where the boy had lain on the floor, and turned fierce eyes on the figure by the fire.

George estimated that his wood might last ten minutes longer. Then there would be a rush, a crunching of bones and all would be over.

A rifle shot sounded from the outside, and one of the bears dropped to the rocky floor, struggled spasmodically for a moment, and then straightened out and lay still. The next instant another shot, equally accurate, came and the second bear was dead in a moment.

The boy waited eagerly for the appearance of the man who had done the shooting. He had no idea who the man might be, and was not quite certain that the fellow had not taken from him one danger only to place him in another. Still, he looked eagerly forward to his appearance.

When the man appeared, a smoking double-barreled rifle in his hand, George saw a tall, ungainly figure with long legs, a long, slim body, very

high cheek bones, and rather stern and uncompromising blue eyes.

The newcomer was dressed in the leather jacket usually worn by trappers in that district, leather leggins, moccasins, and fur cap. A belt of red leather, probably colored and tanned by some Indian process, was drawn tightly about his waist. There were gold rings in his ears which swung an inch down on his brown cheeks.

"Hello, sonny!" the man said, advancing into the cavern, standing the butt of his rifle on the rock, and leaning on the barrel.

"Say," the boy almost shouted, springing forward and extending his hand, "that's about the best shooting I've seen in a year!"

"The place to hit a bear," the new-comer replied, "is in the neck, right about where the spinal cord starts to crawl under the skull."

"It's a good thing you came along just as you did," George stated. "I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am, and so you'll have to take that for granted. You saved my life!"

"I'm Antoine," the other said, in a moment, after a casual survey of the boy. "I'm a hunter and trapper. I saw the bears looking in, and knew from the smoke coming out that there was a human being in here, too. Knowing that bears and humans don't mix remarkably well, I came in, too. That's all there is to it!"

"I guess they would have mixed with me all right in about a minute," George said with a smile. "I had about abandoned hope!"

"How'd you get here?" asked Antoine.

George related the story of the adventures of the

previous night, omitting, however, any mention of the Little Brass God. While he talked, there came to his mind an indistinct impression that the face of the man he had seen sitting by the fire was the face of the man who now stood before him.

He put the thought away instantly, for he did not believe that the person who had left him on the floor of the cavern to die of cold and exposure, or to be devoured by wild beasts, could be the same who had so opportunely rescued him from death.

"You must be hungry, I take it," Antoine said, after the boy had concluded his recital. "Boys usually are hungry."

"You bet I'm hungry!" George replied.

Antoine glanced smilingly about at the two bears lying on the floor.

"Can you cook bear steak?" he asked.

"Can I?" repeated George.

Antoine pointed to the Boy Scout medals on the lad's coat sleeve.

"You have the Stalker and Pioneer medals," he said. "You ought to know something about forestry."

"How do you know what they are?" smiled George.

"Oh," was the hesitating reply, "I know quite a lot about Boy Scout work and training. Fine lot of fellows, those Boy Scouts!"

"Right you are!" declared George.

Antoine now drew forth a hunting knife which seemed to be as keen as a razor and began removing the skins from the dead animals. He worked swiftly and skillfully, and in a short time the making of two fine black bear rugs were laying in the sun outside.

"Now," the man said, "you get busy with that steak over the coals, and I'll tote in more wood. You don't seem quite up to carrying heavy loads yet. That must be a bad wound."

"I think I must have lost considerable blood," George answered.

After the steak was nicely broiled, Antoine brought water from a nearby stream, and the boy's head was carefully and rather skillfully attended to.

"And now," said Antoine, "we'll go to my own home, which isn't far away."

Without a word the boy followed the hunter through the deep snow which lay on the slope until they came to an opening in the rock. Entering, the boy found a very comfortable cavern, almost completely lined with fur. There was a chimney-like crevice in the ceiling which permitted the escape of smoke and foul air. Both inside and outside the entrance were great stones by which the place might be sealed up from either side.

"Quite a cozy nest!" George ventured, and Antoine nodded.

"We'll celebrate your arrival with a cup of good strong tea," he said.

The tea was brewed and drank. Then the trapper's face began to assume grotesque forms. The boy's head swam dizzily. He caught a cynical smile in Antoine's eyes and dropped back into a drugged and dreamless sleep!

Chapter X

BOYS IN A TIGHT PLACE

"Who's there?" asked Tommy's voice, as Will beat frantically against the rocky bulkhead against which he stood.

"How do I get in there?" asked Will.

"Go around to the entrance and shoot up this half-breed!" advised Sandy. "He's got us cornered!"

"He's got me cornered, too!" shouted Will.

"Then I guess he's got the high hand," Tommy answered back.

"Say," Thede's voice exclaimed, "the rock at the end of that passage isn't more than a foot thick and it's full of cracks, at that. If you had a couple of big whinnicks, you could smash it down."

"I can find the whinnicks all right!" answered Will.

"Say!" cried Sandy. "you want to hurry with those whinnicks, for Pierre is almost standing on his head, threatening to shoot if you try to break through."

Will collected a number of heavy stones which had fallen from the walls and threw them with all his strength against the partition.

The cracks widened, and slivers of brittle rock fell away. His efforts were greeted with cheers from the other side, and he redoubled them, with the result that in a short time, a passage between the two sections of the underground chambers had been made.

When Will stepped through the opening he saw Pierre's fur cap sticking up above a barrier which reached almost to the ceiling. The long barrel of his rifle protruded threateningly into the room.

"I guess," Will proposed, "that we'd better get out of range of that gun. It doesn't look good to me."

The boys crowded back into the chamber which Will had recently left and looked at each other with inquiring eyes.

Pierre's harsh laugh came from the outer room.

"You thieves!" he cried. "You die like bear in a trap."

"What does the old idiot mean by that?" asked Will.

"Search me!" replied Tommy.

"How did he ever get you in here?"

"That's a pretty question to ask of us!" declared Tommy. "How did he ever get you in here?"

"He came to camp and volunteered to help find you run-away boys," replied Will. "He brought me to the hills and tumbled boulders into the entrance to the cavern."

"Well, he came to our assistance almost as soon as we reached the hills in search of George," Tommy grinned. "He was so mighty careful to get us into safe quarters that he led us into this rotten hole and fixed it so we couldn't get out!"

"What's he doing it all for?" Will asked, turning to Tommy.

"Perhaps Thede Carson can tell you better than I can," replied Tommy. "You remember Thede Carson, don't you, Will?"

"I seem to see a faint resemblance in this lad to a

boy I used to know as Thede Carson," Will laughed. "He looks now, though, as if he had plenty to eat, and a good place to sleep!"

"I have been eating regularly," grinned Thede, "but there's no knowing whether I'll ever connect with another bear steak."

"He came up here with Pierre," Sandy explained. "Perhaps he can tell you what the half-breed is up to."

"I don't know any more about it than you do!" replied Thede. "He didn't seem to like the idea of my associating with George," the boy added with a wink at Will, "and so he bunched us together and locked us up."

While Pierre gave vent to hoarse shouts of rage, and many entirely unnecessary and insulting taunts, the boys explained the events of the past night. The thing which startled Will most was the story Thede told about having caught sight of the Little Brass God.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Certain sure!"

"It wasn't the firelight or anything like that?"

"No, it was the Little Brass God!"

"Was it Pierre who sat before the fire?"

Thede shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't think so," he replied.

"Did you see the man's face?"

"Only in the shadows. His chin was on his breast at first, and then, when he looked up, he turned his head the other way."

"Well," Will said, "we have at least located the ugly little beast."

"Did it look complete and whole?" asked Tommy.

"That's one question you didn't answer when you told me about having seen it."

"Just as good as new," replied Thede. "If it had been opened at all, the trick was turned by a man who understood the combination."

"And now about George?" Will asked.

"Some one carried him away," Thede declared.

"That's the way I figure it out," Tommy cut in.

"He didn't walk away," Tommy added, "because there were no tracks his size. There were plenty of other tracks, but none which could have been made by George's shoes."

"Aw, how do you know anything about that?" demanded Sandy. "We saw a large moccasin track there, and how do we know that some man didn't walk behind George and step on all his tracks?"

"Or how do we know that some big chump didn't carry him away in his arms?" Tommy admitted. "I never thought about the means that might have been used to conceal the kid's exit. You're the only real live Sherlock Holmes in this crowd," the boy added with a laugh.

"Then it's a cinch that some one carried him away," Will decided.

"Of course it is!" Sandy answered.

"Look here!" Tommy said after a moment's reflection. "Don't you boys remember how mussy that cavern looked. We were all so anxious to chase out and find George that we didn't pay much attention to the room, but I begin to remember now that it looked as if some one had shot wild game there and cooked meat over the fire."

"I remember something about that now!" Thede said.

"And there was more blood on the floor than ever came from the little wound George received, according to the way you describe it," Tommy went on.

"And I'll bet if we'd hunted around the cavern, we'd have found bear steak and refuse hidden in some of those odd little nooks."

'I guess that's right," Thede declared.

"Now, about those moccasin tracks?" asked Will.

"Let's go out and follow 'em up!" grinned Sandy.

"Sure!" replied Tommy. "Just bite your way through these rocks and go out and follow 'em up."

"It's only a question of time when we'll get out," Will insisted. "That crazy half-breed can't keep us in here forever!"

"If he keeps us in much longer," Tommy declared, rubbing the waistband of his trousers affectionately, "he'll have me starved plumb to death!"

"Me, too!" Sandy cut in. "I'm shy a breakfast myself!"

"And I'm so hungry that I could eat snowballs!" Thede said, with a grin. "I don't think I ever was so hungry!"

"Why don't you go outside and take a shot at that half-breed?" Tommy asked, looking reproachfully at Will.

"Did he get your guns away from you?" asked the boy.

"You bet he did!" replied Tommy.

"How did he do it?"

"He asked us to lay them aside while we crawled through a crack in the rock, and then grabbed them. Oh, he's a foxy old fellow, that!"

"Well, we can't get out if we stand here talking

all day," Sandy ventured. "The longer we stay, the hungrier we'll get!"

"What I'd like to know," Will suggested, "is this: Why did he do it? What spite has he against us?"

"If you leave it to me," Thede replied, "the Little Brass God has something to do with it! I don't know whether Pierre has possession of the ugly little beast, or whether he is trying to get possession of it, but I believe he has a notion that we're trying to get hold of it."

"Well, that's a good guess," grinned Tommy.

During all this conversation the voice of the half-breed had been frequently heard, alternately cursing and coaxing the lads to enter the outer chamber where he could talk with them.

"What do you want?" Will asked finally.

"Come here!" was the answer.

Tommy stepped half-way through the opening and flashed his searchlight into the apartment beyond.

"That is better!" shouted Pierre.

"So that's what you want?" demanded Tommy. "You want light to shoot us by!"

"Send the other boy out!" demanded the half-breed. "Send out the one I brought here!"

"He wants you, Will," Tommy said.

As the boy was about to step into the opening, Thede caught him by the arm and drew him back.

"Just you wait a minute," he said.

The lad placed a sliver of rock in Will's hat and held it beyond the opening, at the same time letting the rays of the searchlight fall full upon it.

"I know that half-breed better than you do," Thede said, as he pushed the hat out further and further.

When the hat was about as far out as the boy could send it without risking his own hands, a rifle shot rang through the cavern and the bullet cut it's way through the exposed hat.

"Don't you see?" Thede asked. "He knows you have a gun, and he figured that you'd fall into this chamber, and that we wouldn't dare reach over for it. He's a foxy old reprobate!"

"What next?" demanded Will.

"You just wait a minute!" Thede advised. "I think I know a way out! If we just could get in behind that half-breed and chuck him into the prison he prepared for us, it would be a mighty fine joke on him!"

Chapter XI

THE HALF-BREED

But the way out was not to lie through undiscovered passages! It was set by fate that it was to lie over the dead body of the half-breed!

While the boys discussed the possibility of finding an unguarded exit from the series of caverns, another shot sounded, and then they heard the rattle and crash of rocks falling upon an equally hard surface.

"There's something doing, now, sure!" Tommy exclaimed.

"Do you know of any other trappers in this section?" asked Will, turning to Thede. "It seems to me that that shot came from outside, and I don't believe Pierre would be throwing down his own barricade."

"I haven't seen anyone else here," replied the boy, "except the one we saw in front of the fire last night."

"And that might have been Pierre, for all we know!" Tommy declared.

"You don't know whether it was Pierre or some one else," Sandy observed, "so we don't know whether there's another hunter roaming around here or not! I hope there is, so far as I'm concerned!"

The question was settled in a moment. Rocks continued to fall from the barrier, and in a moment a voice called out:

"Who's there?"

"Four of us!" was the reply.

"Why don't you come out?"

The boys detected a faint chuckle in the voice.

"We're willing!" Sandy answered.

"Well, come on, then!"

Sandy stuck his head out of the entrance and turned his searchlight on the new-comer. After a moment's inspection of the fellow, he stepped into the outer cavern.

"You look pretty good to me," he said.

He was about to say more when he caught sight of the body of the half-breed lying just inside the cave.

He turned white and for a moment felt dizzy and faint.

He was unfamiliar with death in any form, and this snuffing out of a life seemed to him particularly horrible.

In a moment the other boys came out and stood looking down upon the body. They were all deeply affected by what had taken place, particularly Thede, who had never received anything but the kindest treatment from the half-breed until the arrival of the Boy Scouts.

"It was my life or his," Antoine explained.

"Did he shoot at you?" asked Will, "we heard only one shot, save the one fired by Pierre at my hat."

"He didn't get an opportunity to fire!" Antoine answered. "He had his gun leveled at my head when my bullet ended his life!"

"Now I wonder," thought Will, "whether it was Pierre who sat by the fire last night, and whether

the secret of the Little Brass God dies with him! I wish there were some way of knowing."

While these thoughts were passing through the brain of the boy, Thede stood regarding the newcomer in a puzzled way. Slowly the impression was forming in his mind that it was not Pierre who had sat before the fire in the chamber where the Little Brass God had been displayed.

"I suppose the next thing on the program," Antoine observed, with a smile, "will be breakfast."

"That suits me!" shouted Tommy and Sandy in a breath.

"Well," Antoine answered, "I have plenty of bear meat, and a few canned provisions, and plenty of good, strong tea, so we'll adjourn to the dining room and partake."

"Have you seen anything of our chum?" asked Will.

Antoine smiled, but made no reply.

"Look here," Sandy said, pointing down to the moccasin tracks, as they emerged from the cavern and found themselves on the snowy slope, "this man has passed along here before this morning."

"That's a fact!" Will exclaimed. "So he must be the man who carried off George. If he is, why doesn't he say so?"

"Perhaps he wants to give us a surprise," observed Tommy.

It was only a short distance from the system of caverns where the boys had been imprisoned to the home of Antoine, which has previously been described.

When the boys entered, they looked eagerly around

in the hope of finding George, but the boy was nowhere to be seen.

"I thought sure you had found our chum in the cavern," Thede suggested.

"Why, I thought you boys were all here!" replied Antoine, still with that odd smile on his face.

"But there is a boy who was wounded in the bear cavern last night," Thede explained, "and I left him there while I went after his friends, and when I came back, he was gone. We thought sure you took him away."

Antoine made no reply. Instead, he busied himself with breakfast.

In his efforts in this direction Tommy and Sandy were not slow in joining, and in a short time beautifully broiled bear steaks were smoking on tin plates which Antoine had taken from a cupboard fastened to the wall. A pot of tea was steeping over a fire built at one end of the cavern. The boys eyed this with interest.

"We really ought to be going out in search of George," Will finally said. "He may be suffering in the cold."

"That's right!" declared Tommy. "I'm going out just as soon as I finish eating! The lad was carried off by some one, all right, and he can't be far away!"

"I wonder why we didn't get our revolvers away from that dead man?" asked Sandy. "We surely ought to have them!"

"I looked for them," Will said quietly, "but they were not there!"

"Then he must have hidden them away some-

where," Tommy declared. "We laid them down just before crawling through that hole."

"You will doubtless find them in time," Antoine suggested.

"I should think the half-breed would have kept them pretty close," Sandy observed. "You don't find automatics like those every day!"

"It strikes me," Antoine said, directly, "that you boys would better settle down for a little rest previous to going out after your chum."

"Aw, we don't need any rest!" declared Tommy.

"Not while George is out in the cold!" Sandy cut in.

"Just as you please," smiled Antoine. "And now," he went on, "if you've all had plenty to eat, I'll bring on the tea. Tea always tastes better to me when there is no food in my mouth to interfere with the flavor of it. I have a very fine brand here."

"We've been waiting for that tea!" laughed Tommy.

"You can't lose Tommy when it comes to anything good to eat or drink!" laughed Sandy. "He's always on watch."

Antoine seemed a long time pouring the tea into the tin cups, which he had placed on the rough board which served as a table. As he bent over the teapot, a familiar sound caught Will's ears and he turned his head aside to listen.

"Slap, slap, slap!"

The boy nudged Tommy who sat next to him with his elbow and called his attention to the sound. Tommy almost sprang to his feet as he listened, but Will forced him back with his hand.

"Slap, slap, slap!" came the signal again

Sandy and Thede were now sitting with knives and forks suspended in the air, listening wide-eyed to the sound.

"That's the Beaver call!" declared Will in a whisper.

"That means George!" Tommy whispered back.

"Sure!" was the reply. "There's no one else to give the Beaver call here. I wonder why the boy doesn't show up."

In the meantime, Antoine had been busy over the teapot and had not noticed what was going on at the table.

"I'm fixing this tea up particularly strong," he said, facing the boys with a smile on his lips, "so you mustn't wonder if it tastes just a little bit bitter. There's nothing on earth will do a man who's been exposed to the weather more good than a strong cup of tea!"

The man poured the decoction into the tin cups and brought out a couple of cans of condensed milk and plenty of sugar.

"You see," he laughed, "that I have all the luxuries of an effete civilization! Put in all the sugar you like, if you find the tea too strong. I have plenty of it!"

The boys used the sugar and milk liberally, and Will was about to lift his cup to his lips when the Beaver call came again:

"Slap, slap, slap!"

Although the sounds were faint ones, they caught the attention of Antoine, who, scowling, turned his face in the direction from which they had proceeded. In a minute, he arose.

"What was that noise?" he asked.

"Did you hear a noise?" questioned Will.

"I thought I did!" replied the man. "Perhaps I'd better take a look about the place. There may be intruders here!"

As Antoine moved about, his footsteps in a measure muffling the sounds which followed, the boys heard a low whisper.

"Don't drink! It's drugged!"

Wondering why the boy did not show himself, and able to understand his strange conduct only on the theory that he had been gagged and bound, Will overturned his cup of tea by an awkward movement and sprang to his feet as the burning fluid came in contact with his clothing.

Simultaneously the boys all sprang from the table, taking care to upset the board upon which they had been eating. An angry exclamation came from Antoine's lips as the carefully prepared tea was spilled to the floor. In a moment, however, his face broke into a smile.

"Too bad!" he said, "but accidents will happen. I'll make you some more! I'll have it ready in a moment."

"We really would like some tea, notwithstanding our awkwardness," laughed Will, listening as he spoke for some further sound from his chum.

"Drugged, drugged, drugged."

The boys heard the whisper floating through the room. Then they heard a gasp as of some one coming out of a sound sleep, and saw Antoine springing toward a weapon lying on the floor.

Chapter XII

A SURPRISE AT THE CABIN

Will got to the weapon first.

With an exclamation of rage and anger, Antoine drew his hunting knife from its sheath and lifted it threateningly.

"Keep back!" he said. "Keep back, every one of you!"

"Throw down the knife, then!" Tommy demanded.

Instead of throwing down the knife, Antoine seemed preparing for a spring. It was evident that he had not yet abandoned the hope of gaining his revolver. The weapon which Will had seized left his hand with a swift whirl, and the next moment the knife crashed from Antoine's hand to the floor. The fellow's wrist had been broken.

He fell back with a groan, but remained inactive only a second.

"I'll come back!" he shouted, and disappeared through the entrance.

Tommy followed him out after having secured Will's automatic, but he was nowhere in sight on the slope. The tracks in the deep snow showed that he had turned in the direction of the cavern which the boys had known to their cost that morning.

"He's gone after our revolvers!" shouted Tommy.

"I'm afraid that's right," Sandy answered, sticking his head cautiously out of the opening. "He's the man who hid them, probably!"

"He'll be back directly," Will prophesied, "so one of you would better remain on guard at the door. If he catches us all inside, we'll be in the same fix we were when he found us!"

"I'd rather fight bears than a snake like that!" declared Sandy.

A faint voice was now heard calling from some unseen recess.

"Tommy, Sandy, Will!" George's voice called.

Leaving Tommy at the door, the three boys passed around the chamber pounding on the walls with little rocks and listening eagerly for further words. At last they came to where a bear skin hung against a crevice. They drew it aside and saw George looking up at them.

"Vot iss?" asked Sandy with a grin.

"So you heard me in time!"

The boy's speech was low and indistinct.

"If we hadn't, we wouldn't be here," answered Sandy.

"That Beaver call sounded good to us, too!" Will observed.

"What about the tea being drugged?" asked Sandy.

"It put me to sleep in a minute!" declared George. "My head whirled for a second, and then I was out for the count."

"I guess he thought he had you laid away for a good long time," suggested Sandy.

"I reckon I woke up too soon for him," George answered with a faint smile. "I heard you boys talking, though you seemed a long way off, and at first I thought it was all a dream."

"We got a feed in that dream, anyway!" laughed Sandy.

"I tried to cry out but couldn't," George continued. "My lips seemed frozen into numbness. I couldn't move hand or foot for a time, but finally I managed to clap the palms of my hands together in the Beaver call, and that seemed to set the blood circulating through my veins."

"What do you make of it?" asked Sandy.

"If you leave it to me," whispered George, still faint from loss of blood and the effects of the drug, "I dope it out that this man who calls himself Antoine is in possession of the Little Brass God, and he has in some way discovered that we are here after it."

"That's a fact!" exclaimed Will, "you saw the Little Brass God, too, didn't you?"

"I certainly did!" was the reply.

"Well, was the man who sat before the fire, the same man who gave you the drug?" Will went on. "Did you see him plainly?"

"I've been wondering about that," George replied. "Sometimes I think Antoine is the man who sat before the fire with the ugly Little Brass God leering down at him. Sometimes, I think it was Pierre who sat there. I can't quite make up my mind."

"If it was Pierre," Will said gravely, "the Little Brass God will probably never be found! The man who gave you the drugged drink shot the half-breed to death this morning."

"Then I hope it wasn't Pierre who sat by the fire," Sandy declared. "We've come a long way after that Little Brass God, and got into many a mix-up over it, so we've just got to take it back to Chicago with us!"

"Now look here," Will reasoned, "this Antoine had some motive in putting us boys to sleep! We don't know what that motive was, but I think I'm giving a pretty good guess when I say that he wanted to prevent our interfering with the Little Brass God until he had arranged to make anything we might do in that line absolutely worthless."

"That listens good to me, too," declared Sandy. "The man wouldn't try to drug us unless he had some strong motive for doing so!"

"We're all together once more, anyhow!" Will observed, "and I think we'd better stay together. I never did like this idea of one boy sneaking away in the night and leaving the others to guess where he went to. It isn't safe to go wandering off alone in that way!"

"Yes, I'd talk about that if I were you!" laughed Sandy. "You go wandering off by yourself more than any of the bunch!"

"I think it's a good thing for you boys that I went wandering off alone this morning," Will argued.

"You didn't go wandering off alone!" Thede cut in. "You had Pierre with you? Poor Pierre!" he continued. "I'm sorry for him! I suppose we'll have to make some kind of a grave and give him decent burial!"

"Sure, we'll do that!" agreed Will. "But what is puzzling me just now is this," the boy went on, "how are we going to get out of this hole with that Antoine watching our every move? He'll shoot us down just as quick as he shot Pierre if he gets a chance."

The boys took short trips out of the cavern in quest of their enemy, but were unable to discover

any traces of him other than the tracks in the snow. These led toward the chain of caverns which the boys had such good reason to remember.

"I think we'd better make for the camp," Will suggested in a moment.

"Why not move over to the cabin?" asked Thede. "It will be much more comfortable there."

"That's a good idea, too," Will agreed, "except that we'd have to move all our camp equipage and provisions."

"Well, why not?" asked the boy. "We can rig up a drag and draw the stuff over in two or three loads."

"We can if Antoine isn't shooting at us every minute!" Sandy cut in.

"I don't believe Antoine will trouble us," Thede answered. "If he has the Little Brass God, he'll probably make off with it. He's got to go somewhere to get his injured wrist tended to, and my opinion is that he'll simply disappear from this neck of the woods until he makes up his mind that we have gone back to Chicago."

"I hope he won't go very far," Will mused.

"If he does, we'll lose the Little Brass God!" Sandy argued.

"I don't agree with Thede," Will said directly. "If the man has a secure hiding place in the hills, he'll manage to treat the injured wrist himself and remain hidden until he thinks we have left the country."

"It's all a guess, anyway," Sandy exclaimed, "and, whatever takes place, I vote for moving our truck over to the cabin and settling down there!

We don't want to go back to Chicago as soon as we find the Little Brass God, do we?"

"We certainly do not!" shouted Tommy, sticking his head into the narrow doorway. "I haven't had a chance to catch all the fish I want yet!"

"Well, we may as well move over to the cabin if that's the general opinion," agreed Will. "I must admit that those tents look pretty thin to me. I didn't expect snow to fall so early."

"Besides," Sandy urged, "if we live in the cabin, we'll be perfectly safe from attack. It would take dynamite to make a hole through those great logs, and the door itself is about a foot thick!"

"All right," Will replied. "If we find anything left when we get back to our camping place, we'll move it over to the cabin!"

"The first thing to move will be George," laughed Sandy.

"Oh, I can walk all right!" the invalid declared.

"Through this thick snow? I should say not! We've got to make up some kind of a sled and give you the first sleigh-ride of the season!"

"And while we're about it, we can make a sled that we can move the tents and provisions on," suggested Will.

The boys had little to make a sled with, but they finally managed to bind saplings together with such cord as they had in their possession, and so manufacture a "drag" upon which the wounded boy could be carried back to camp. The lads were strongly tempted to help themselves to Antoine's provisions before they left, but they finally decided not to do so, especially as they believed that they had plenty of their own.

"He'll need them all before he gets rid of that sore wrist," Sandy laughed. "He won't be in shape to do much hunting!"

"Now," Thede observed, after wrapping George up in one of the bear robes taken from the wall of the cavern, "I've been thinking that the cabin is a great deal nearer the camp. Of course I haven't been to the camp, but I've heard the location described and I'm positive that it is four or five miles further away from us than the cabin."

"So you want to take George directly to the cabin, do you?" asked Tommy, who still considered himself on guard and kept a constant lookout for Antoine. "I don't see why we shouldn't do so," he added.

"It isn't far out of the way," urged Thede.

"Then here we go to it!" laughed Tommy. "I'll chase on ahead and have a roaring fire built there before you get half way to it!"

"Oh, you will?" grinned Thede. "I'd like to know how you're going to find it! George and I are the only ones in this party who can find the mysterious cabin in the bog!"

"Well, then," Tommy admitted, "perhaps you'd better run on ahead and find it, while we come along with the kid!"

It was a long and painful journey to the cabin, but it was finished at last. When the boys came to the edge of the swamp, however, they saw a great column of smoke rising from the chimney on the roof.

"Now do you suppose Antoine beat us to it?" asked Thede.

Chapter XIII

A FACE AT THE WINDOW

When the boys came nearer to the cabin, they saw many footprints dotting the level surface of the snow. They peered through the window which gave on the side of their approach, but could see no one moving about on the inside. Save for the great fire blazing in the rudely-constructed fire-place, the cabin seemed to be absolutely deserted.

"Suppose you give me a boost through this window," Thede suggested, as the boys at last stood close against the rear wall.

"Why not go around to the door?" George asked.

"I might get a bullet in my coco when I turned the angle of the house!" replied Thede. "There's no knowing who's around there."

"That's a fact!" Will agreed. "We've got one wounded boy on our hands now, and we don't care about having another."

"Look here," George cut in crossly, "if you think I'm too much trouble, you can just drop me down in the snow anywhere and I'll take care of myself!"

"Aw, cut it out!" roared Tommy.

The boys laughed so heartily at the idea of leaving their chum in the snow to care for himself that his mood instantly changed to one of apology. In a moment, he was all smiles again.

"Now, if you've got that little scrap settled, you can give me a boost through this window!" suggested Thede.

"Sure the door's closed?" asked Tommy.

"Closed and latched!" was the answer.

The boys had some difficulty in removing the single sash which protected the opening, but the task was finally accomplished, and then Thede crawled through into the cottage.

The boys heard him drop lightly to the floor and then followed a long silence. Presently Sandy clambered up the log wall and peered inside.

He saw Thede standing close against the wall, gazing down at a great haunch of venison which lay on the floor.

"If you want to keep that in good condition for eating, hang it out in the frost," laughed Sandy. "We can't afford to lose that!"

Thede beckoned to him to enter, and the boy dropped down on the floor.

"Who brought it here?" he asked.

"Search me!" Thede answered.

"It might have been Antoine."

"Aw, he couldn't kill a deer and bring in that big haunch with that lame wrist of his!" Thede exclaimed.

Sandy looked out of the window and beckoned to his chums to enter.

They gathered around the haunch of venison with amazement depicted on their faces. The fire still burned brightly, and it was evident that it had not been long since new fuel had been laid.

"Some one made us a present, I take it!" Tommy grinned.

"But who?" demanded Will.

"It's one of the mysteries of the British Northwest Territories!" replied Sandy. "Suppose," the boy

continued, "we open the door and bring George in. He must be getting cold by this time!"

"Be careful when you open the door, then," Thede warned.

But there was no one at the door or, at first, within view of it. There were plenty of tracks, however, which appeared to have been recently made. George was carried into the cabin, and then Sandy and Tommy set out to trace some of the foot-prints to their destination.

"I'm going to know where that fellow went," the former declared.

"I have an idea he'll come back before long," Sandy suggested. "He's built a nice fire and brought in plenty of venison, and won't go away and leave the cosy corner just yet."

When the boys came to the edge of the morass, they saw a figure flitting into the underbrush on the other side.

"I guess we've frightened him away!" Tommy declared.

"Shall we follow him?" asked Sandy.

"Aw, what's the use?" Tommy questioned. "You said yourself, a little while ago, that he'd come back to get a bite of that haunch of venison."

"And I believe he will!" answered the boy.

George was made comfortable in one of the bunks, additional fuel brought in for the night, and then Will, Tommy and Sandy set out to bring the supplies and tents from the camp.

"Suppose Antoine, or some one else, should bring the Little Brass God to this cabin," George began.

"I wish we knew whether it was Antoine who sat before the fire last night," Thede puzzled. "If I

could just get my hands on that idiotic little plaything, I'd sneak back to old Finklebaum and get his hundred dollars so quick it would make his head swim."

"His hundred dollars!" repeated George. "I thought I heard you saying last night if you got hold of the Little Brass God, you'd make him put up a thousand dollars for it!"

"So I would, too," declared Thede. "And he wouldn't pay the thousand dollars, either, unless he saw a chance to make ten out of it!"

During the entire absence of the boys George and Thede discussed the mystery of the Little Brass God. They wondered how it had made such good time into that country, and puzzled over the strange fact that they had blundered upon it on the very night of their arrival.

But when at last the boys returned with the tents and a part of the provisions, drawn along on the "drag," they had reached no conclusion whatever.

It was all a mystery which time alone could solve!

Although it was now the middle of the afternoon, Will and Sandy insisted on making another trip to the old camp.

"If we're going to stay in the cabin," Will urged, "we've got to do the job some time and we may as well do it now."

"I guess you'll have a good load if you get it all!" Tommy suggested.

The boys insisted that they were able to bring in the remaining stock and set off through the snow. Tommy and Thede continued to drag in wood until there was a great stack of it piled against the cabin. Every time they opened the door, they looked in

vain for the appearance of the man they had seen running away through the underbrush on the other side of the swamp, but he was not seen.

"I'd like to know what's the matter with that fellow!" Tommy observed as darkness settled down and the two boys returned to the cabin.

In half an hour Sandy and Will came in with the provisions which they had brought from the camp. They reported that quite a large share of the tinned stuff had been cached in the snow about half way between the cabin and the site of the old camp.

"We couldn't bring it all in," Sandy announced.

"I hope the man we drove out of the cabin will find it if he needs it," Will observed.

After a hearty meal they cleared away the dishes and sat around the fire discussing the situation until ten o'clock. Then they secured the door and windows of the cabin and crawled into their bunks, which were remarkably well supplied with blankets and tanned bear skins.

In the middle of the night the fire died down to embers and Will arose to pile on more wood. He moved softly about in order not to disturb the sleep of his chums, and finally sat down by the blaze to enter anew upon a mental discussion of the mystery which surrounded them.

Will heard the sash rattling, as if in the light wind which was blowing, and glanced toward it.

What he saw was not the velvet darkness of the night laying against the glass. The firelight which shone through the glazed sash revealed the outlines of a human face looking in upon him.

It was an ugly face, with dusky skin, narrow slits of eyes, and straight black hair which seemed to

wind and coil about the repulsive countenance as a collection of serpents might have done.

The face disappeared as the boy looked, and Will tiptoed softly to the bunk where Tommy lay and awoke him with a violent shake.

"Get up!" he said.

"Aw, go chase yourself!" answered Tommy not very politely.

"It's worth seeing," Will assured the lad.

Tommy seized a shoe from the floor, hurled it at the head of his chum, and then rose to sitting position, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"What have you found now?" he demanded.

"There's a new one on us!" Will declared.

Tommy opened his eyes wide in wonder.

"Not a new Boy Scout?" he asked.

"We seem to pick up plenty of new Boy Scouts," laughed Will, "but this isn't a new Boy Scout. This is the Little Brass God given the power of expression and the use of his legs!"

"So you've gone and got 'em too, have you?" demanded Tommy.

"When I got up to renew the fire," Will answered, "I heard the window sash to the north rattling. Thinking that I ought to go and fix it, I glanced that way and saw the Little Brass God looking down upon me."

"Was he sitting up in the window with his legs crossed, and his arms folded, and his face making you think of the Old Nick?" asked Tommy.

"I could see only the head, but the head looked exactly as I imagine the Little Brass God looks; with the firelight shining on the yellowish hide, the

face gave me the impression of being made out of brass!"

You better read another page out of the dream book and go back to bed!" laughed Tommy. You've been laboring under strong excitement lately and I think you need a long rest."

Chapter XIV

A CALL FROM THE DARKNESS

"Perhaps you don't believe I saw anything at the window," replied Will, somewhat indignantly.

"Oh, I don't doubt that you think you saw something at the window."

Will seized a searchlight, grabbed Tommy by the shoulder, and pulled him out of the door and around to the north side of the cabin.

The boys were not dressed especially for a midnight excursion in the snow, and their teeth chattered as they made their way against the chilling wind. However, they stuck to their purpose and soon stood under the window which Will had pointed out."

"There!" the boy exclaimed in a triumphant tone. "Now perhaps you'll tell me I didn't see anything through the glass."

A light snow had fallen during the late hours of the night, and there, plainly revealed on the undisturbed surface—undisturbed only for what they saw—were clearly outlined the footprints of two people.

One had worn moccasins, the other such shoes as might have been purchased at any department store in Chicago.

"And the tenant came back!" grinned Tommy.

"Then why didn't he come in?" demanded Will.

"Because he's scared of us!"

The boys followed the tracks toward the morass some distance and then returned to the cabin.

"Whoever the fellow is," Will argued, "he found it necessary to get a half-breed or Indian guide."

"How do you know that?" asked Tommy. "That may have been Antoine in the moccasins."

"I give it up!" replied Will. "I don't know anything about it."

"I shouldn't wonder at all if some faithful Hindu had sailed across the Pacific ocean, and traveled half across the continent, to rescue a faked Brass God from the polluted hands of an Unbeliever."

"You don't really think there's any of this Hindu temple business in this Little Brass God case, do you?" asked Tommy.

"Well, the face I saw at the window looked like that of an East Indian!" declared Will. "His skin was brassy, and his eyes had the devil's leer in them just as the eyes of the Little Brass God are said to have."

"Well," Tommy declared with a yawn, "I'm going back to bed!"

"That's what I'm going to do," Will agreed. "If we sit up here until we solve this new problem, we'll probably never get any more sleep as long as we live."

Seeing that the door and windows were securely fastened, the boys, who had been sleeping together, went back to their bunk, and there was only the crackling of the fire and the roaring of the wind to break the silence.

Tommy was soon sound asleep, but Will lay awake listening. Again he heard the window sash rattle, but this time he did not move.

Then he dozed off into slumberland, dreamed that he was on a tropical island where the perfume of the

roses was so heavy on the air that breathing almost became a task. He opened his eyes dreamily, saw the fire blazing cheerily, heard the wind roaring around the corners of the cabin, and closed them to dream the same dream over and over.

At last he awoke with a start and sensed a peculiar odor in the room. He lay perfectly still for a moment wondering what it could all mean, when a voice as smooth and as evil as the hissing of a snake, cut through the air. He listened but did not move.

"You have hidden it!" the voice said.

There was a long pause and then the voice broke the silence again.

"Arise and come to me."

The next moment the boy heard Thede moving in the bunk above. The lad first threw his legs over the rail, and Will heard him drawing away the blankets. Then the boy slipped softly to the floor and moved, as one who walks in his sleep, toward the north window.

"Come to me, come to me, come to me!" the voice repeated insistently.

"I'll come to you, all right, in about a minute," Will mused, "if you try any of that magic business here."

Thede continued to move toward the window, walking with his hands outstretched, as the somnambulist frequently walks.

When the boy reached the window he staggered back as if from a blow, then moved forward again, as if bent on leaving the cabin by way of the narrow opening.

Will raised himself in the bunk, drew an automatic from under his pillow, and fired point blank at the

glass. There was a crash and the cabin grew cloudy with powder smoke.

Thede sat down on the floor abruptly and began rubbing his eyes.

"I guess I walked in my sleep," he said. "I do sometimes."

The shot had awakened Tommy and Sandy, who came bounding to the floor.

"What'd you shoot at?" they asked.

"The Little Brass God!"

"I guess you've got the Little Brass God on the brain!" grinned Sandy.

"Yes," Tommy cut in, "you've gone and busted a perfectly good pane of glass when there isn't another one within a hundred miles."

"Did you hit any one?" George called feebly from the bunk.

"I don't know!" replied Will. "I'm going out to see in a minute."

But Tommy and Sandy were out of the door and chasing around the corner of the house before Will could disentangle himself from the blanket.

Instead of passing outside, then, he stepped over to the window and looked out. The boys were there looking over the freshly fallen snow with an electric searchlight.

"Did I see anything?" asked Will with a note of victory in his voice.

"Somebody saw something!" answered Sandy. "There's blood on the snow! Some one found a bullet!"

"I'm going to dress and find out where these tracks lead to!" Tommy declared. "This is too much mischief for me!"

"Stick your face up in the air," advised Will with a grin.

"Snow!" shouted Tommy with a gesture of disgust. "These tracks'll be full of the beautiful before we could walk forty rods!"

"That's about the size of it!" agreed Will. "So you may as well come back into the house and we'll go back to bed."

When the boys entered and closed the door again, it was four o'clock and they decided not to go back to bed again that night.

"How'd you know there was some one there?" Sandy asked of Will.

"I heard the window sash rattle, then a strong perfume—something like opium or hasheesh—was forced into the room, then the fellow on the outside began to work his hypnotic spell."

"You say it right!" exclaimed Tommy.

"It's just as simple as anything you ever read in a daily newspaper," declared Will. "This Little Brass God we are tracing up belongs either in a Hindu temple in India or the Hindus think it belongs there. At any rate, some dusky old hypnotizer has been sent after it!"

"You'd better get a new dream book!" Sandy broke in. "Whoever came to the window tonight, came there to find out what we were doing in this cabin! That's all there is to that!"

"Whoever came to the window tonight," Will repeated, "came there for the purpose of hypnotizing one of us boys into telling where the Little Brass God is hidden!"

"Then he must be about fourteen miles off his

trolley," laughed Sandy. "We don't know where the Little Brass God is hidden."

"He threw an Oriental perfume or narcotic of some kind into the room and let out his persuasive language," Will went on. "If you don't believe he hypnotized Thede, just ask him what he heard just before he got out of bed."

"I heard some one calling to me," Thede answered.

"What did he say?"

"He told me to come to him."

"And you was obeying that command when you started toward the window?"

"I guess that's right," answered the boy, "but it's all so hazy that I don't know much about it."

"And then I fired at the window and broke the spell and also the pane of glass!" explained Will. "If he comes back here again, I'll shoot from the outside! We can't be kept awake nights by any East Indian magic."

"East Indian granny!" declared Sandy.

"You read about such occurrences in the newspapers every day!" declared Will. "We see people hypnotized and forced to obey the commands of others, not only in the private parlor but on the open stage. Sometimes, too, the hypnotic influence is assisted by strange Oriental perfume. There's nothing extraordinary about it at all! In fact, there is only one word that describes it, and that is the word uncanny."

"Fix it anyway you want it!" grinned Tommy. "There's a broken window, and there's blood on the snow, and we found Thede lying on the floor when we sprang out of bed. If that doesn't make a good

case of circumstantial evidence, I don't know what does!"

"This Little Brass God is getting on my nerves!" declared Sandy after a short pause. "We've been up against smugglers on Lake Superior; up against rattlers and wreckers in the Florida Everglades, and up against train robbers on the Great Divide, but this ghost business gets my goat!"

"Perhaps you'd like to go back to Chicago empty-handed?" asked Tommy.

"Not so you could notice it!" was the reply. "If there's anything I like, it's nice little Boy Scout excursions like this. All we have to do to get busy is to get a camping outfit together and march off into the wilderness. Everything else comes right along as a matter of course. Everything else, from magic haunches of venison, which appear when you wave your hand, to Little Brass Gods, which grin down from the wall one second and vanish in smoke the next!"

"Aw, come on to bed!" cried George.

"I'm going to sit up and get breakfast!" declared Tommy. "Sandy's got a grouch on, and there's nothing on earth so good for a grouch as a slice of broiled venison."

Tommy dressed himself and chased outdoors in order to bring in the meat supply. He returned without it. The venison was gone!

Chapter XV

A HUNTING EXPEDITION

The boys remained at the cabin all the next day stirring out only for wood and game. Without going more than a dozen yards from the habitation, the boys shot three rabbits and half a dozen squirrels.

These were taken about noon, and the boys immediately began the preparation of a stew. There were a few potatoes left, and these they pared and sliced into the savory dish when it was nearing completion.

They expected, every one of them, to receive another visit from the mysterious persons who had appeared at the cabin on the previous night, yet they did not talk of what was in their thoughts. They discussed the sad plight of Antoine, wandering about in the forest with a broken wrist, and wondered if the cached provisions were still intact.

The following night was a quiet one. Snow fell heavily, and the small streams of that section took on icy blankets.

When they awoke the following morning, the sun was shining brightly, and there were many signs of a pleasant week.

"After breakfast," Tommy declared, as he sent his plate over for the third helping of the rejuvenated stew, "I'm going out and get a specimen of every wild animal in the woods. Then I'm going to put them all into this stew!"

"You might put a wolverine into it!" suggested Thede.

"Are they good to eat?" demanded Tommy.

"They're good to eat game out of the traps, I understand," replied the boy. "Or, just for a change," Thede continued, "how'd you like an owl in your stew? I guess that wouldn't put you wise or anything!"

"You seem to know quite a lot about this country," Will suggested.

"Poor Pierre taught me quite a lot during our rambles," Thede answered sorrowfully.

"Then perhaps you'd better come along with Tommy and me and show us where to get these different kinds of animals the kid wants to put into his stew. That will help some."

After breakfast the three boys started out with their automatics.

They crossed the morass to the higher ground beyond and passed along in the direction of the camp. There might be duck over Moose river, Thede suggested, and Tommy certainly would want a duck for his stew. Also there might be wild geese there.

When they came to the place where the provisions had been cached, they found the surface of the ground broken and the provisions gone. Not a single can remained.

"Now, we'll have to shoot all the more game," declared Tommy. "We haven't got many beans or tomatoes left, so we'll have to forage on the country."

The loss was not considered a serious one, for the boys had plenty of provisions at the cabin and game was very plentiful.

As they passed through the country signs of the wild creatures of the woods were numerous. There were few spaces of a length of twenty-five feet in which the track of some wild beast or bird did not cross their path.

Thede read this writing in the snow so understandingly that the boys actually paid more attention to his explanations than to the discovery of the game he was talking about.

"What crossed there?" Will would ask.

"That must have been a red deer!"

"And this track, here?" asked Tommy.

"Probably a fox."

"Well, what do you make of this?" Will demanded with a wink at Tommy.

"That must have been a moose, but he passed here some time before the last fall of snow!" replied Thede.

"Well, what's this wobbly little mark here?" Tommy asked.

"Partridge!" replied Thede readily.

"Well, here's another odd little mark. Looks like some one had been dragging a rail fence. What's that?"

"You ought to know that!" answered Thede.

"I ought to know lots of things that I don't know!" commented the boy.

"Well," Thede said with a laugh, "the wild animal that passed along there was a Beaver!"

"I wonder if he belongs to our patrol!" chuckled Tommy.

"I should think the little fellow would freeze to death," Will objected.

"Pierre said it was pretty cold for them to be out

when he saw tracks two or three days ago!" replied Thede. "They're building a dam over on the river some place, and I suppose they think they've got to finish the job before real winter sets in."

After a long ramble through the forest, the boys came to the site of the old camp. The snow which covered the ground here had been well trodden down, and many tracks led in the direction of Moose river.

"I suppose they've been hunting for deserted provisions," Will suggested. "I'd like to know who it was that made the search!"

"It might have been your Hindu friend," suggested Tommy.

"Look here, kid," Will said in a moment. "Now that this Hindu discussion has broken out again, I'd like to know what you think the chances are for locating that little brown man."

"Well," Tommy answered, "I believe you were right when you said that the Little Brass God meant something more than intrinsic value to at least one of the men who are chasing it up. Now," the boy went on, "if this brass-faced fellow has the sacred idol nut in his head, he won't leave this section of the country until he finds it."

"That's the way I figure it out!" Will answered.

"And this adds another interesting feature to the case," Tommy continued. "When we started out we were alone in pursuit of the Little Brass God. Then we came upon Pierre, and we were just beginning to believe that he also was in search of the merry little jigger when Antoine murdered him. Now, here comes a third interest, and, if you are

anywhere near correct in your conclusions, he comes all the way from India."

"You don't know where he comes from!" Will interrupted. "The question we want to ask ourselves now is this:

"Have we any chance of recovering the article we were sent after if we remain in this district? In other words, ought we to settle down here and wait for things to quiet, or ought we to make an effort to discover the whereabouts of the two men who have expressed such decided opinions regarding the value of the Little Brass God?"

"Meaning Antoine and the alleged Hindu?" asked Tommy.

"Exactly," was the reply. "You see," Will went on, "there's no use of our remaining in camp here if the person who has the stolen article in his possession has taken it away."

"I believe Antoine has it!" declared Tommy.

"If Antoine has it, if that was Antoine sitting before the fire that night, why did he take the Little Brass God there instead of concealing it in his own cavern?"

"The more we talk about it, the less we know," grinned Tommy.

"Night before last," Will began, "the Little Brass God was in a cave only a few miles from this spot. I don't believe it has been taken out of the district! If you boys leave it to me, we'll stay in the cabin for a few days, and take quiet trips about the country, particularly the hilly country to the south, in search of Antoine and the Hindu."

"That suits me!" Tommy declared, "and I know

it'll suit George and Sandy, too! There'll be a lot of fun in tramping about."

"Then why not make a trip to the range of hills right now?" asked Will. "We can be back long before night."

"I don't know about that," replied Thede who had been listening to the conversation without speaking. "It's a long way over to the hills and the snow's deep."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do!" Tommy exclaimed excitedly. "We'll get a lot of game and send you back with it, and you tell the boys that if we don't return tonight, we'll be camping in some of those caverns in the hills."

"I thought you'd be ready for another runaway night excursion!" laughed Will.

"I suppose I don't run away when I'm with you!" commented Tommy.

Will only laughed, and the boys began the collection of rabbits and squirrels and ducks until Thede was pretty well loaded down. They all walked along together until they came to where it would be necessary to part company because of the different directions to be taken.

There Will and Tommy turned toward the south while Thede kept straight on toward the cottage on the island in the swamp.

"There's one thing we forgot," Tommy suggested as the boys tramped laboriously through the snow. "We forgot to bring along anything to eat!"

"Yes, we did!" laughed Will. "Don't you think I'll ever start out on a tramp with you without plenty of provisions."

The boy opened his heavy coat and revealed inside

pockets packed with sandwiches made of venison steak and bread, with now and then a sandwich composed of stewed meat and griddle cakes, for variety.

"We won't have to go home tonight, now, will we?" laughed Tommy.

"In Chicago," Will began, "we had a boy in our office we used to call The-Young-Man-Afraid-Of-His-Bed. You must be related to him, for I have never known you to go to bed without objecting, or to get up without thinking how much time you had wasted!"

"Never you mind me!" replied Tommy. "You wait till you get into some of those caverns in the hills and build a roaring fire, and I'll show you that you're not the only boy that can provide provisions."

"You mustn't do any shooting over there!" warned Will. "We might as well go in quest of the Little Brass God with a band!"

"That's a fact!" agreed Tommy in a discouraged tone.

The boys first visited the cave where George had seen the Little Brass God grinning down from the wall. There seemed to be no one within miles of them.

While they talked, however, a shadow fell on the oblong bit of light which marked the entrance, and a tall figure with one bandaged wrist, leaning on the barrel of a rifle, stood gazing down upon them with hatred flashing from his eyes.

"It's Antoine!" whispered Will.

"Yes, and he won't do a thing to us now!" whispered Tommy.

Chapter XVI

ANTOINE ON THE RUN

Antoine regarded the boys steadily for a moment without moving a muscle. Will and Tommy believed that the fellow meant mischief, and were wondering if they would be able to get their automatics from their pockets before he could bring his rifle to a shooting level.

One question had at least been answered. The boys had been wondering ever since settling at the cabin whether Antoine had not taken his departure from that country. His presence there at that time answered this question in the most uncomfortable manner. The man was evidently there on a mission not to be interfered with by so simple a thing as a broken wrist.

"Well, boys," Antoine said in a moment, his face relaxing into a smile which was far more terrifying than the previous look of hatred, "it seems that we have come together again!"

"Welcome to our midst!" grinned Tommy.

Antoine eyed the lad keenly for an instant and then turned his eyes toward Will.

"What are you doing in this country?" he asked.

"Fishing and hunting!" was the reply.

"Hunting for what?"

"Do you think we're looking for a forty story skyscraper?" demanded Tommy.

Again Antoine glanced sharply at the boy, but

seemed determined not to give the slightest attention to his irrelevant observation.

"Who sent you here?" he asked of Will.

"Gee-whiz!" exclaimed Tommy angrily. "Is this the third degree?"

"How long are you going to remain here?" asked Antoine, without paying any attention to the boy's question.

"Gee!" exclaimed Tommy. "You make me think of the stories of little Clarence in the newspapers! You're the original little interrogation point."

"You'd better answer my questions!" thundered Antoine, losing his temper at last.

Now this was exactly what Tommy had been hoping for. Antoine angry might prove to be more communicative than Antoine in a pleasant temper.

"Will you answer a few of my questions?" asked Will, wondering if it would be possible for him to spring upon the trapper and bring him down before his rifle could be brought into use.

"If you'll keep that impertinent little gutter-snipe still," Antoine snarled, "I'll answer such questions as seem to me to be worth answering."

"Are you the man who was seen sitting half-asleep before a fire in a cavern three nights ago?" asked the boy.

The man hesitated for a moment, as if in deep thought, and then answered with an exclamation of impatience.

"Were you in the cave that night?"

"No, but my chums were," Will replied.

"What did they see there?"

"A man asleep by the fire!"

"Perhaps the man wasn't asleep at all. What else did they see?"

It was Will's turn to hesitate now. He was wondering if he ought to mention the fact of the presence in that cavern of the Little Brass God.

At first it seemed to him that he ought to do so, that he might be able to secure information as to the exact situation from Antoine by facing him with the fact of the discovery of the ugly little idol.

Then he reasoned that an acknowledgment that they knew anything whatever of the Little Brass God would be likely to get them into deeper trouble, if possible, than that which they now faced.

So the boy decided to say nothing whatever of what George and Thede had seen shining in the light of the fire.

During this brief time of silence Antoine brought his rifle into a more menacing position and began stirring about angrily.

"Are you going to answer my question?" the man finally demanded.

"That's about all so far as I know!" replied the boy.

Of course Will was not telling the exact truth, but he believed that, under the circumstances, he was privileged to shade the exact facts a trifle in the interest of his own safety.

"What was it you put in the tea you gave George?" asked Tommy with a mischievous grin on his freckled face.

"I put nothing whatever in it!" replied Antoine, "that is, I put nothing in it calculated to do the boy any harm."

It seemed to the boys that Antoine's manner was becoming more conciliatory every moment.

"The lad was worn out, weak from loss of blood, and sadly in need of attention," the man went on, "and so, after caring for his wound and giving him a good breakfast, I gave him a mild sleeping potion, which, as you already know, affected him only a short time."

"You say it well!" grinned Tommy.

Antoine threw an angry glance at the provoking youngster, but soon turned to Will once more.

"I didn't quite understand the sudden attack the boys made on me," he said. "I was astonished when I received the blow which broke my wrist."

"Who set your wrist?" asked Will.

"There was only one bone broken, and I set it myself!" was the reply.

"Perhaps we did wrong in taking it for granted that George had been drugged to get him out of the way, and that we would share the same fate," Will admitted after a moment. "But, under the circumstances, I don't see how we could have done any differently."

"I'm sorry you were so precipitous," Antoine said with what was intended for a sauve smile. "You boys, I understand," he went on, "are now occupying the cabin on the island in the marsh."

"Who told you that?" asked Will.

"No one!" was the reply. "I have been near the place twice since you took possession.

"Why didn't you call?" demanded Tommy.

Again the boy's question was ignored.

"Did you see any one loitering about the cottage

when you were there?" asked Will. "You were there in the daytime, I suppose."

"Why do you ask that question?" demanded Antoine, giving a quick start. "Have you been annoyed by people hanging about the cabin?"

Will didn't know whether to relate the story of the midnight visit or not. He finally decided that the least he said to Antoine the better it would be for him, so he replied that they had passed two very restful nights in the deserted log house on the island.

"Did you find it deserted?" asked Antoine.

"It had the appearance of having been recently occupied," replied Will. "I understand from one of the boys that Pierre formerly lived there."

"So I understand!" Antoine replied grimly. "The point now is, whether it was occupied by any one after Pierre left it."

Not caring to tell the exact facts, Will said nothing whatever, and for a moment there was a rather embarrassed silence.

"What do you say about that?" demanded Antoine.

"Why, I think there was a little fire left when we went into the place," Will replied, "but that might have been a left-over from the day before. Those large fires burn a long time."

"And you say that you have not been disturbed at all during your occupancy of the place?" Antoine continued.

"Now I wonder how much this fellow knows," Will asked himself while Antoine stood gazing curiously down upon him. "I wonder if he knows about the people who came there that night? He seems to have a suspicion that some person is wandering about

the country, and keeping pretty well out of sight. I wish I knew how much he knows."

"Oh, we have slept all right," he finally said, in reply to the man's question. "A mess of healthy boys will sleep under the noise of battle!"

"I ask these questions," Antoine said directly, "because I have seen strange foot-prints in the snow at different times, and it seems to me that some person or persons are skulking through the woods and, for some reason known only to themselves, keeping out of sight of honest men."

"He knows all about that affair at the cabin," Will concluded. "Now," he went on, "I wonder why he's so very much interested in these strangers, whoever they are?"

"Oh, come on!" Tommy exclaimed. "Don't stand here all day! We've got to get back to the cabin before it gets too dark to make our way through the woods."

The two boys took a couple of steps forward at a venture, without knowing whether Antoine would oppose their leaving the cavern.

"Well," he said, as he stepped to one side, "if you boys see any strangers loitering about, I wish you'd let me know."

The two lads amazed departed without making any promise, but they did not at once turn in the direction of the cabin. Instead, they plunged through the snow in a southerly direction, after seeing that Antoine had gone the other way.

"Where are you headed for now?" asked Tommy.

"Just wandering about on general principles," replied Will, at the same time turning into one of the

caves belonging to the system of underground passages. "Thought I'd look in here first!"

The lads entered the cavern as noiselessly as possible and looked guardedly about. A great heap of furs lay on the floor, and two figures rested upon them apparently lost in slumber.

Tommy pointed to the modern shoes on the feet of one of the sleepers. Then he silently called attention to the bloody bandage wrapped about the man's head. He looked at Will inquiringly.

"Do you suppose," he whispered, "that these fellows are here after the Little Brass God, too?"

The men seemed willing to answer the question for themselves, for they sprang to their feet and glared at the intruders angrily.

One of the men was dressed as a trapper, although he did not look the part. He was tall and angular, with sharp features and keen black eyes.

His companion was shorter, but equally slender. His eye orbits were small and oval in shape, his face was a dusky brown, and there was, somehow, about the man an atmosphere of the Orient.

While the four people glared at each other a step was heard in the narrow entrance, and in a moment Antoine's face was clearly outlined against the narrow slit of light.

The trapper took in the group at one quick glance, and, turning in his tracks, fled precipitately down the slope. Without speaking a word, the two men who had been found in the cavern, turned and followed him.

"Now what do you think of that?" demanded Tommy.

Chapter XVII

"Boys up a tree!"

When Thede returned to the cabin with numerous squirrels, rabbits and ducks, Sandy greeted him with a shout of joy.

"This will seem like living in the north woods!" he cried. "We'll have all kinds of game from this time on!"

"You bet we will!" replied Thede. "I'm some hungry myself, when it comes to that! I guess I can get a few!"

"You never shot all these!" Sandy doubted, poking the squirrels and rabbits about with a finger. "You never got them all by yourself!"

"How do you know I didn't?" asked Thede, with a provoking grin.

"Because you couldn't," Sandy answered.

"All right, then," admitted the boy. "We all had a share in the shooting, and Will and Tommy sent me back with the game."

"Where have they gone?" asked Sandy, a look of indignation over-spreading his face. "They're always running away and leaving me to watch the camp! I wish they'd give me a chance sometime."

Thede sat down in one of the clumsy chairs which the cabin afforded and laughed until his sides shook.

"I don't think any of you boys are famishing for fresh air and adventure," he said in a moment. "You seem to me to be kept pretty busy."

"Well," Sandy exclaimed, "they might let me go with them when they start off on a tour like that. Where have they gone, anyway?"

"They said they were going out in search of the Little Brass God!" laughed Thede.

"Honest?" demanded Sandy.

"That's what they said!"

"I hope they don't find it!" Sandy exclaimed.

The boys cooked a liberal supply of game for dinner and then began restlessly walking to and fro over the cabin floor.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" asked George in a moment, speaking from the bunk.

"Hello, you've woke up, have you?" demanded Sandy. "I thought perhaps you'd sleep all day! How's your head feel?"

"Rotten, thank you!" answered George.

Sandy took a couple more turns about the room and then sat down by the side of the bunk where George lay.

"I know what's the matter with you!" George said, directly.

"What's the answer!" asked Sandy, rather sourly.

"You need exercise!" replied George. "You've been ramming about the cabin all the morning, and I've been wishing for the last three hours that you'd take to the tall timber."

"Is that so?" shouted Sandy springing to his feet.

"Yes, that's so!" answered George. "I wish you and Thede would go out for a ramble. If you don't know what else to do, walk over to the river and catch a fish. That'll go all right for supper."

"You're on!" cried Sandy.

The boys were ready for the trip in a very few

moments. It was not necessary now to provide against mosquitoes and "bull-dogs," for the sudden cold spell had effectually silenced them for the winter.

"Now don't you fellows come home unless you bring about twenty pounds of trout," George directed as the two lads opened the door and disappeared from sight.

The boys had proceeded but a short distance when Sandy called his companion's attention to a peculiar foot-print in the snow.

"I guess we must be approaching the corner of State and Madison again!" he laughed. "We come out into the woods to commune with nature, and find some new party butting in every time we turn around."

"That's an Indian's foot-print!" declared Thede.

"How do you know that?" demanded Sandy. "You haven't seen any Indian, have you? How can you tell an Indian's foot-print from any one else's? That may be a white man's step, for all we know!"

"Nay, nay, me son!" laughed Thede. "I know by the shape of the moccasin and by the way the fellow walks."

"You know a whole lot of things!" laughed Sandy. "If you keep on accumulating knowledge, you'll beat Tommy out of his job as the Sherlock Holmes of the party!"

"Well, if you don't believe he's an Indian, you'd better go and ask him!" Thede argued. "He's right over there in the thicket!"

Sandy gave a quick start of alarm and put his hand back to his automatic. Thede motioned him to leave his gun where it was

"This is a friendly Indian," the boy explaineb. "I've often heard Pierre refer to him. He's called Oje, but I don't know whether that's his name or not. He's said to be the champion fisherman of this section, and if you really want to get fish for supper, we'd better get him interested."

Oje was not a very romantic looking Indian, his general appearance being that of a bear fitted out with about three hides. The boys noticed, however, that none of the clothing he wore was fastened closely about his waist or throat. In fact, as he joined them with a grunt, they saw that the roughly-made garments were nearly all open.

The Indian knows better than to bring his clothing where it will come in contact with either his breath or with perspiration. Should he do this in very severe weather, he would soon find everything about him frozen stiff. He is sure, however, to carry enough clothing with him to keep him warm in repose and during the long nights.

"How do you know that's Oje?" whispered Sandy, as the Indian stood looking questioningly at the two boys.

"Because he answers to the description."

"Howdy!" the Indian exclaimed in a moment.

The boys returned the greeting, and then followed a conversation which was almost entirely expressed by signs.

Oje was invited to proceed with the boys on a fishing trip, and, later, to accept of their hospitality at the cabin. The Indian gave a grunt of assent, and at once turned toward the river.

As they passed the spot where the cache had been, Sandy glanced curiously toward the Indian, as

though wondering whether he had not been the one to dig out the provisions. The Indian, however, walked on without appearing to notice either the rifled cache or the suspicious glances of the boy. Arrived at the river, the Indian, after carefully testing the ice, walked to a small island near the shore.

The boys looked on while he began his preparations for fishing. He went about the work quietly, yet seemed to be remarkably exact in all his motions. First he cut about twenty feet of fish-line in two in the middle of the piece and tied one end of each part to one end of a stick which he cut from the shore.

The knots he made in the fastening seemed primitive, but it was discovered later that they held very firmly. After a time he tied a bass hook to each fish-line, and on each hook he speared a little cube of fat pork which he drew from his pocket, and which had evidently done service through a long series of fishing expeditions.

Next he cut two holes in the ice, which was not very thick at that point, and over these the boys were invited to stand, sticks in hand, lines dangling from the poles.

Hardly had Sandy lowered his line which had a bullet flattened around it for a sinker, when he felt it jerk to one side, and almost immediately drew up a three-pound trout.

"Now, what do you think of that for catching fish?" demanded the boy.

Oje gave a satisfied grunt at this evident appreciation of his services, and motioned the lads to continue their sport.

Next Thede caught a gray trout somewhat smaller

than the fish landed by Sandy, and then another three-pound speckled trout was landed.

"I guess if some of these fellows with hundred dollar fishing outfits could see us hauling beauties out of the water like this, they'd begin to understand what real fishing means!" Sandy exclaimed.

It was a glorious day for fishing, although a trifle cold. The sun shone down with a brilliance unequaled in more tropical climates, and there was little wind to send the chill through the clothing. After the boys had caught plenty of fish they started back toward the cabin.

Oje walked through the wilderness with a different manner from that with which he had accompanied the boys in the journey toward the river. He glanced sharply about, and frequently stopped to examine trifling marks in the snow. After a time he pointed to the track of a rabbit which had apparently departed from the faint trail in extreme terror, judging from the speed which had been made.

"Strange man!" he said significantly. "Find track soon!"

"Do you mean," asked Sandy, "that there's some one chasing us up?"

"Find track soon," was all the explanation the Indian would make.

"Of course!" Sandy declared. "We couldn't think of going back to the cabin without butting into some new combination!"

In a short time the Indian discovered the footprints he was looking for, and pointed them out to the boys. Two persons had passed that way not long before. The tracks in the snow showed that

one had worn moccasins and the other ordinary shoes.

"I should think that fellow's feet would freeze!" Sandy observed. "He don't seem to have any overshoes on!"

"How do you know?" asked Thede. "He may have a small foot and wear overshoes shaped like a shoe itself."

"I wish we could follow the trail and find out where they're going!" Sandy observed.

"I'm game for it!" declared Thede.

The two boys pointed to the foot-prints and started to follow them.

The Indian seemed pleased at the idea, and soon led the way toward the range of hills whither the foot-prints pointed.

"The first thing we know," Thede suggested, "we'll be running into a nest of black bears. They're thick as bees up in this country, and they'll be hungry, too, with all this snow on the ground."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a succession of low, angry growls came to the ears of the boys, and the next moment they saw Oje springing into the lower branches of a great fir tree.

"I guess he knows what's good for his health!" shouted Sandy. "Me for a tree, too!"

The boys probably never made quicker motions in their lives.

"Have you got a searchlight with you?" asked Thede.

Sandy shook his head sadly.

"Then we can't see to shoot the beasts," wailed Thede, "and it looks to me like one of those long, cold nights in a tree!"

Chapter XVIII

A PILLAR OF FIRE

"Can you build a fire with one match?" asked Thede, after a short silence, during which the boys had been trying in vain to get a shot at the bears.

"Of course I can!" answered Sandy. "What's the good of going through all those Boy Scout examinations, if a fellow can't build a fire with one match? Of course I can build a fire with one match!"

"Can you build a fire with one match up in a tree?" asked Thede, with a suspicion of mirth in his voice.

"Of course I can!" answered Sandy.

"Up in a tree in the darkness, on a windy night?" asked Thede.

"If this thing is going to your head, you'd better drop down and make a run for the camp!" advised Sandy.

"Honest, now," asked Thede, "can you make a fire with one match in a green tree, in a high wind, on a dark night?"

"Cut it out!" roared Sandy.

"Because if you can," Thede explained, "I think I can show you a way out of this mess!"

"Well, go on and show it, then!"

"All you've got to do," Thede went on, "is to build a fire and drop the burning brands down on top of the bears. That will bring them out into the

light for a second or two, and perhaps we can drop them with our automatics."

The boys heard the Indian moving softly about in the branches of the tree he had selected as a refuge, but paid little attention to what he was doing. Afterwards, they discovered that he had dropped his rifle at the foot of the tree, and was trying to secure it.

"Why did you say build a fire with one match?" asked Sandy. "I always carry a lot of matches," the boy added, feeling in his pocket.

"Find any?" asked Thede.

"Not a match!"

"I knew you wouldn't!" Thede said.

"How'd you happen to know so much?" grunted Sandy.

"Because," Thede replied, "I saw you feeling in your pocket for a match and bring your fingers out empty while at the cabin. Then you went to a match box and laid a great heap of 'em on the table. I thought of it while we stood there, but it never occurred to me to tell you to stow them away."

"I remember now!" Sandy said regretfully.

"Well," Thede responded cheerfully, "I've got just one match. I wonder if you can light a fire with that!"

"You just wait a minute and I'll tell you!" replied Sandy.

Thede heard him moving about over the limbs of the tree, his every motion being punctuated by growls from below. Then came an exclamation of satisfaction from the darkness, and Thede heard the boy declaring that it was a dead tree they were in, and that there was plenty of dry wood.

"All right, start your fire, then," suggested Thede, "and we'll see if we can't burn the backs off some of those bears!"

"Perhaps we can break off enough dry limbs to make a rousing old fire that will keep till morning," Sandy said in a moment. "If this old tree is really dead to the heart, it'll make quite a blaze."

Sandy gathered a great handful of twigs not more than a couple of inches in length and placed them in a sheltered position in the lee of the tree. Then he added dry boughs of larger size and made ready to use the precious match.

"Now you know what'll happen if that match goes out!" said Thede.

"This match," said Sandy confidently, "is not the kind of a match that goes out. I'd be a healthy old Boy Scout if I couldn't build a fire in the top of a tree with one match!"

The boy waited until there came a brief lull in the wind, then with the match protected as much as possible by his hat he struck it.

The flame spluttered for an instant, died down, crawled around to the windward side of the stick, crawled back again, and then flared up gloriously. At first the dry twigs refused to ignite, but presently one caught the blaze, then another, and directly Sandy was obliged to draw his face away from the growing heat.

"There!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you I could do it?"

"You said you could," answered Thede, "but I didn't believe it!"

"Look here," Tommy said in a minute, sheltering

his face from the smoke. "First thing we know, we'll have this whole blooming tree on fire."

"If it gets good and hot, we can fry fish after the bears go away," suggested Thede. "I'm hungry! By the way," he added with a grin, "where are those fish?"

"Do you think I brought 'em up in the tree?" demanded Sandy.

"You never left 'em down there?" asked Thede.

"Didn't I?" exclaimed Sandy. "What did you do with the ones you were carrying?"

"Why," replied Thede, "I guess I left 'em in the thicket where we stood when we made a hop-skip-and-jump for the tree."

"We certainly are a bright mess!" cried Sandy.

"Say," Thede said in a moment, "I'll just bet that's what kept the bears so still while we've been up here building the fire. They've been eating our fish! That's why we couldn't get sight of them!"

"Can you see the bears now?" asked Sandy. "I'm sure I can't!"

"They're still back in there eating our trout!" wailed Thede.

"Unless you want a leg burned off," advised Sandy, "you'd better work around on another limb!"

"Aw, this limb is all right!" argued Thede.

The light from the fire now illuminated quite a little circle around the tree, and the boys saw Oje sliding cautiously down the trunk of the tree where he had taken refuge.

"He's after his gun!" declared Sandy. "Just watch out and you'll see him get one of those bears!"

Oje certainly was after his rifle, for he slid down cautiously, keeping the bole of the tree between himself and the bears.

Much to the surprise of the lads, the Indian did not again climb into the shelter of the branches. Instead, he stood peering around the trunk of the tree as if waiting for the wild animals to make their appearance. The flame blazed higher and higher and the boys began to feel uncomfortable.

"I'll bet there ain't any bears here!" Sandy exclaimed after a moment's silence. "I guess we run away from a rabbit!"

"I guess we didn't!" insisted Thede.

The boy's opinion was verified a moment later by the appearance of three shambling figures in the lighted zone. The bear is noted for his curiosity, and the boys realized, too, that the feast of fish must have been devoured.

"We might have sneaked away while they were eating that fine supper!" Sandy said, in a tone of disgust. "I think we ought to have medals made out of a cow's ear! That would be a good medal, wouldn't it, for boys who showed such courage in the face of the enemy?"

"Never you mind!" Thede answered. "I guess the bears are next to their job. We wouldn't have gone far before they'd been after us."

As the bears appeared in the light of the fire, now blazing fiercely and fast climbing from one dry limb to another, the lads saw the Indian raise his rifle to his shoulder and fire.

Instead of taking to their legs, the bears grouped themselves around their fallen mate and snarled savagely up into the tree.

"Oje will get another one in a minute," Thede ventured, overjoyed at the success of the first shot, "and then we can open fire with our automatics."

"Holy Moses!" cried Sandy. "Here we've been sitting here watching the panorama with our guns in our pockets! I guess we don't know much about hunting bears, when it comes down to cases."

"Well, it isn't too late to shoot yet," Thede declared.

"It's getting pretty hot here, anyhow," said Sandy, "and we'll have to drop in a minute, whether we shoot or not. This old tree seems to be as dry as tinder!"

"Yes," Thede agreed, "I guess you started something when you made such good use of that one match."

The boys moved about on the limb in order to get at their automatics. They noted then, for the first time, that the perch upon which they rested was burning close to the trunk. They called out to each other, almost simultaneously, to shift to the trunk of the tree.

But it was too late. They felt themselves swinging through the air, and the next moment there was such a mixture of boy and bear at the bottom of the tree as has rarely been seen in the British Territories.

Both boys landed squarely on the back of one of the animals. Of course, they rolled to the ground instantly and grabbed for their automatics, but their movements were no quicker than those of the astonished bear.

"Woof!" he said. "Woof!"

Translated into boy-talk, this read "Good-night!"

and a second later they heard both bears tramping through the forest as if pursued by a pack of hounds.

"What do you know about that?" demanded Tommy.

Without replying, Thede scrambled to his feet and dashed into the thicket where he had left the fish. He returned in a moment with a woeful face which set his chum into roars of laughter.

"They ate our fish!" he said.

"What'd you think they'd do with them?" demanded Sandy. "Did you think they'd put 'em in cold storage and keep 'em for next summer?"

"What I'm sobbing about," Thede went on, "is that the bears certainly made a monkey of me. They weren't after us. They were after the fish!"

"Well, they got the fish, didn't they?" asked Sandy.

"And we might have been on our way while they were devouring them!" wailed Thede.

The tree was now virtually a pillar of fire, and the boys moved out from under it. They found the Indian standing, stolid and indifferent, just out of the circle of light.

"Just think of all that funny thing happening and he never seeing any humor in it!" exclaimed Sandy.

The Indian lifted his hand for silence, and pointed off toward the hills. Then, motioning the boys to follow him, he led the way into a thicket and crouched down.

Directly the panting and puffing of a man exhausted from a long run, was heard, and the familiar figure of Antoine dashed into the circle of light! He glared about for a moment and then dropped down on the snow, evidently completely exhausted.

Chapter XIX

The Signal from the Hills

"That's a funny proposition, too!" whispered Sandy.

"That's the gink who tried to feed us poisoned tea," Thede whispered back. "I wonder what he's running for."

The Indian drew at the boys' sleeves to enforce silence, and all three sat perfectly still for some moments. Then Antoine lifted himself to his feet and looked cautiously about.

They saw him examine the bear tracks and heard him muttering to himself as he followed with trained eyes the trail leading into the thicket where the boys and the Indian were hiding.

He drew quite close to the bushes where the three lay; so close, indeed, that they could hear him muttering as he lost the trail because of the darkness. Presently, he turned back.

"I think I understand," he said hoarsely. "Two of the boys were treed by bears and Oje rescued them. I presume they are half way to the cabin before this."

He started along the trail by which the boys had reached the tree but presently turned back. He stood in the light of the fire for a moment and then set off in the direction of the hills.

"Safer there than here!" they heard him grunt as he passed them by.

Oje waited until the sound of the fellow's footsteps were heard no more, and then arose to his feet. Without speaking a word, he, too, faced toward the hills, passing through the snow at a swinging gait.

"What's he going to do now?" queried Sandy.

"I wish I knew!" replied Thede. "Say, look here!" the boy continued, "hadn't we better make a break for the cabin? I don't see any sustenance in wandering around in the snow all night!"

"Oje has something on his mind!" Sandy declared. "And I think we'd better find out where he's going."

"All right!" answered Thede. "I'm game, only I'm wondering what George is thinking about all this time."

It was cold and dark in the forest, and the snow was deep, but the boys trudged bravely on in the direction of the hills. At least they supposed that they were going in the direction of the hills. They could scarcely see a yard in advance of their noses under the thick foliage and so trusted entirely to the Indian, who led them along at a pace which was exhausting to say the least.

There would be a moon shortly after eight, but soon after that time they hoped to be snugly tucked in their blankets in the cottage. For a time they could see the dry tree which they had fired blazing in the distance, but at length it dropped out of sight.

"How long do you think that blooming savage will keep this up?" asked Sandy of Thede, as the two boys struggled along through snow nearly up to their knees. "I'm about all in!"

"He's capable of keeping it up all night!" Thede answered in a dejected tone, "but I hope he'll stop when we come to the hills."

"He does seem to be heading for the hills," Sandy replied. "If he'll only stop when he gets there, I may be able to catch my breath again!"

"Cheer up!" laughed Thede. "The worst is yet to come!"

"Doesn't that look like the moon coming up?" asked Sandy an hour later as they came to a slope which gradually led up to the hills.

"That's the moon, all right!" replied Thede. "But it won't do much good if we keep on walking under the trees. We ought to be home now."

"Does the moon rise in the south?" asked Sandy.

"There's no knowing what will take place in this part of the country," answered Thede. "Me for little old Chicago right soon!"

"I think it's about time we headed for Chicago," Sandy agreed. "When a couple of Boy Scouts who are supposed to be in their right minds climb a tree to get away from bears who are so busy eating stolen fish that they don't know there is a boy within a hundred miles, I think it is about time they headed for civilization."

"What did you mean about the moon rising in the south?" asked Thede.

"Well," Sandy answered, "it looks to me as if there were two moons rising, one in the east and one in the south!"

There certainly was a light growing far up on the hills. In a moment the Indian came back to the boys and pointed out the strange illumination.

"Fire there!" he said.

"What do you think it means?" asked Thede

"Heap campfire!" was the reply.

Oje held up three fingers to indicate that he saw

three fires. His eyes were sharper than those of the boys, who at first saw only a blur of light. Before long, however, they caught sight of three points of flame lifting above the hills. As the boys looked the blazes seemed to die down, or to be obscured by additional material being thrown upon them. As the moon rose, sending a wintry light over the great slope, three gigantic columns of smoke stood where the flames had shown a minute before.

"What do you make of it?" asked Thede.

"Can you read the signal?" asked Sandy.

"Do you really think it is a signal?"

"Of course it's a signal!" cried Sandy. "That's the Boy Scout signal. Do you know what it says?"

"Three smoke columns mean 'Good News'!" answered Thede.

"Do you suppose those crazy boys are still in the hills?" asked Sandy. "If they are, George will think we've all deserted him."

"Of course they're still in the hills!" declared Thede. "No one but Boy Scouts would be sending up those signals!"

"Aw, what good news would they have to communicate?" asked Sandy.

"Perhaps they've found the Little Brass God!" suggested Thede.

"Found your Little Brass Uncle!" cried Sandy.

"Well, it's good news anyhow!" insisted Thede. "If it wasn't the boys wouldn't be taking the pains to build three big fires in order to tell us about it."

The Indian appeared to be suspicious of the campfires ahead until the boys explained to him, with much difficulty, that the fires had undoubtedly been built by their friends, and that they conveyed the

information that agreeable developments awaited them.

The slope of the hills was now bathed in moonlight, and the Indian hesitated about advancing over the many clear places from which the timber fell away. Urged on by the boys, however, he finally proceeded cautiously in the direction of the fires, keeping out of the moonlight as far as possible.

"Oje's afraid we'll bunt into something," Thede said, as they clambered up the slope. "I wonder what he'd think if he should be called out of his bed by a blooming magician from the East Indies."

The signal coming from the hills was farther to the east than the boys had ventured before. The fires seemed to have been built high up on a shelf of rock facing the north.

When the boys came closer they saw two figures moving about in front of the flames. Directly they had no difficulty whatever in recognizing Will and Tommy, as they heaped great piles of green boughs on the coals in order to create dense smoke.

"The kids are in the center of the stage all right!" laughed Sandy.

"I don't see how they dare build fires out in that exposed place," Thede suggested. "There's no knowing who may be prowling around."

"Perhaps they know where the few enemies we have found in this section are keeping themselves!"

"Perhaps they've got 'em shut up in some of their own caverns!" Thede suggested. "Anyway," he went on, "there's something doing, or they wouldn't be talking Boy Scout to us at this time of night."

As the boys drew still closer they heard the

labored breathing of some one running, apparently only a short distance away.

Oje darted away in the direction of the sounds, but soon returned to where the boys waited and headed once more for the Boy Scout signal.

"What did you see, Oje?" Thede asked.

The Indian turned and pointed back over the snowy trail they had followed from the burning tree.

"Man from there!" he said.

"Antoine?" asked Sandy.

The Indian nodded and continued up the slope as if the matter were unworthy of further attention.

"Now, what do you suppose Antoine came here for?" asked Thede.

"Attracted by the fire, probably."

"I don't understand what he's roaming about so much for," Thede continued. "What was he doing out at the burning tree?"

"From the appearance of things," Sandy answered, "I should say that he hot-footed it out there in order to get away from some one who was chasing him, though I can't understand why anyone should be chasing him."

"Anyway, he seems to be back here now," Thede said. "It's dollars to buttons, though, that he doesn't go up to the fire where the boys are."

"Look here," Sandy said in a moment, "I just believe that Antoine has the Little Brass God in his possession, and that the two men who came to the cabin that night are after it!"

"I hope they don't get it!"

"Of course they won't get it," Sandy answered. "Didn't we come away up here into this desolate land to get it ourselves?"

When a few yards from the blazing fires, Sandy paused long enough to give the Beaver call and hear the answer given. Then the lads trooped up to the circle of light and warmth.

"What's the idea?" Sandy asked after greetings had been exchanged. "Did you build these fires so we could cook supper?"

"You're not hungry, I hope!" grinned Tommy.

"Starved to death!" answered Sandy. "We've been treed by bears, and dumped down on the back of a great beast about nine feet long, and had our fish devoured, and there's been nothing doing in the eating line since noon!"

"Never you mind the hardships of life!" grinned Will. "We've got great news for you, so get ready to shout!"

"What's the great news?" demanded Sandy.

"We've got the Little Brass God penned up in the cavern just under this rock! We've got a cinch on him this time!"

Chapter XX

A SIGHT OF THE GOD

"All quiet at the cabin?" asked Tommy.

"All quiet when we left," Sandy replied.

"What time did you leave?" demanded Tommy, suspiciously.

"Shortly after dinner."

"And you've gone and left George alone all this time!" exclaimed Tommy indignantly. "You're a bright lot!"

"We thought you boys would be back to the cabin long before this!" Sandy declared. "But what is it about this Little Brass God?"

"When we reached the system of caverns which we visited not long ago, and in which we were held prisoners for a short time," Will said, "we found two men, well bundled up in furs, lying asleep, or apparently asleep, in one of the smaller rooms. They sprang up when they saw us and seemed about to engage in conversation with us when Antoine made his appearance. Antoine seemed to want to talk with us, too, but when he saw the two men who had been asleep in the cavern he hot-footed down the slope, with the two fellows after him. I never saw a man run so fast in my life."

"I bet they chased him clear to our tree!" Thede cut in.

"I guess he never stopped running until he got there anyway!" Sandy grinned. "But why should

he come right back here after being chased away?"

"I don't think he did!" Will replied.

"Oje saw him out here not long ago!" Sandy insisted.

"What was he doing?"

"I presume he was watching the fire."

"The two men who pursued him are back, too!" Will continued. "Tommy and I found them in a cute little nest in the rocks not more than an hour ago. Just before we built these fires, in fact."

"I suppose you built the fires to lure us from the cabin!" laughed Sandy. "Well, we wasn't at the cabin, but we saw the signals just the same!"

"We wanted you to come and help capture the men who have the Little Brass God," Will answered.

"So you've got the Little Brass God penned up under the hill!" laughed Sandy. "You've got it, and yet you haven't got it!"

"I never said we had it!" Will replied. "I said we had it penned up under the hill. You didn't give me time to explain that there were two men penned up with it."

"All right!" Sandy said. "You've come to the right shop for fighting men. I can see those two fellows fading away at my approach!"

"Then you go in ahead," advised Tommy. "They seem to be well armed and may shoot, if you don't scare them into fits with one of your fierce glances! They're bold, bad men!"

"How do you know they haven't disappeared while you've been making signals?" asked Sandy. "They've had time enough to be five miles away!"

"We nailed 'em in with a couple of boulders!" grinned Tommy.

"You followed Pierre's example, did you?"

"Yes, we just blocked 'em in."

"Well, I think we'd better be getting them out, then!" Sandy urged. "And also be moving toward the cabin. George'll think we've got killed or something."

"Come on, then," Will exclaimed. "I'll show you where they are!"

The boy led the way down the slope for some distance and then paused at a boulder which blocked the entrance to what seemed to be a cavern of good size. They listened for a moment, but could hear no sounds coming from the interior.

"How're you going to get them out?" asked Thede.

"We ain't going to get 'em out!" replied Will. "What do you think we brought you boys here for? We know they can't get out, so we're just going to sit down here and wait for them to get good and hungry."

"All right!" Sandy answered. "Two can watch and two can go back to the cabin! George will be good and anxious by this time."

"I was thinking of asking Oje to watch a short time," Will said. "It's a good thing the Indian came along with you."

Oje was called down to the barricaded entrance and the situation briefly explained to him. The Indian stepped close to the boulder and listened for a long time for sounds from the inside.

Then he turned to the boys and shook his head gravely.

"Don't you ever tell me they've gone and got away!" exclaimed Tommy. "Why, they couldn't

get away unless they walked through forty feet of solid rock! And they couldn't do that!"

"I'm going to find out!" declared Will.

The lads pried the boulder away, blocking it so that it could not crash down the slope and so warn the men inside of the approach of the boys. Then Will crept cautiously into the dark passage.

The others were at his heels in a moment. On the previous visit of Will and Tommy, there had been the light of a torch in the cavern, but there was no illumination of any kind now.

"I guess they've gone, all right!" Tommy whispered.

"Why didn't you get the Little Brass God while the getting was good?" demanded Sandy.

"The guns those fellows carried didn't look good to me!" was the reply.

"It's a mystery to me how they ever got out of this cavern," Will observed.

"Perhaps they are still here, waiting to get a shot at us!" suggested Thede. "This would be a bad place for an attack."

As the boys advanced they heard a whisper of voices farther in, and what seemed to be the rattle of footsteps over the uneven floor.

Then from some, apparently, distant corner of the cavern came a cry in an unknown tongue. The next instant the place was illuminated by two great torches of resinous wood.

They flamed high in the hands of the men who had been discovered in the cavern during the first visit.

"Look!" cried Will, pointing. "Look!"

The eyes of the boys followed the pointing finger dimly outlined in the light of the torches, and saw

the Little Brass God swinging to and fro in an uplifted hand!

"There!" exclaimed Tommy. "I told you we'd got the Little Brass God!"

"But you haven't got it yet!" taunted Sandy.

"We'll have it in a minute!" replied the boy confidently.

The ugly little image remained in sight for perhaps half a minute, and then the cavern became dark as pitch again.

The boys heard a quick rush of footsteps, apparently passing further into the cavern, and then all was silent.

"That isn't the man who had the Little Brass God the other time I saw it!" Thede declared. "I guess these fellows must have got it away from Antoine, or whoever it was who had it at that time."

"I wish we had a searchlight," suggested Sandy.

"I've got a little one for a cent," Tommy answered. "I never leave the camp without one. No knowing when one may be needed."

"Strike a light then!" whispered Sandy.

"That would be a fine way to get a bullet into my coco!" Tommy whispered back. "I'll just wait a while and see what's doing."

There was nothing doing—nothing whatever! The boys, after waiting some ten minutes, advanced into the cavern which was now perfectly still.

Directly Tommy turned on his electric. The little flame revealed no presence there save that of the boys themselves. They searched every nook and corner of the place, believing it impossible that the two men could have escaped. At last, however,

they were forced to the conclusion that once more they had lost track of the object of their search.

"But where did they go?" demanded Tommy.

"I guess that's what no fellow can find out," replied Will.

The boys continued their search in the hope of finding the passage by which the two men had escaped. At last they came to a small opening in the floor of the cavern which apparently led to a cavity farther down.

"They didn't wait for the elevator!" laughed Tommy. "Shall we go down after them?" asked Sandy.

"I think we'd better get back to the cabin," Will argued. "It must be after ten o'clock now, and George may be in trouble for all we know."

"Three times and out!" exclaimed Sandy. "The next time we catch sight of the Little Brass God, we'll sure get out fingers on it!"

"I'd be happy just now if I could get my fingers on something to eat!" Thede declared. "I'm about starved!"

"We've got a few sandwiches, if they'll do any good," suggested Will.

"If they'll do any good!" repeated Sandy. "You bring 'em out here and we'll see whether they will or not."

"Thede ran to the door of the cavern and looked out, calling softly to the Indian as he did so. Oje was nowhere to be seen!

"I wonder where that Indian went?" the boy asked.

"He probably got busy after some one!" Will replied.

The boys devoured the sandwiches which remained from the supply provided by Will and then started back to the cabin.

The moon was now high up in the heavens, and the boys could trace foot tracks in the snow quite distinctly. For a time they saw the prints of Oje's moccasins. They seemed to be following another track which was obliterated by his passage.

"Perhaps he's chasing the two fellows who had the Little Brass God!" suggested Sandy. "If he is, I hope he gets 'em."

After a time the tracks swung away to the left and the boys saw them no more. When they came in view of the cabin a bright light was reflected through the broken window pane, but there seemed to be no evidences of motion on the inside.

"I presume George has gone to sleep," Will said. "I should think he'd be tired of waiting. It must be somewhere about one o'clock!"

When the boys came up to the cottage they saw a figure detach itself from the shadows which lay against the west wall and dash precipitously into the thicket. Will hastened to throw the door open.

The boy started back in alarm, as he noted the condition of the interior. The bunks lay broken on the floor, and it was plain that the whole apartment had been most thoroughly pillaged.

Chapter XXI

TWO RIFLE SHOTS

As the boys stepped into the room George arose from a heap of blankets near a broken bunk and stood regarding them with a quizzical smile on his face. The boys at once clustered around him with dozens of questions on their lips.

"What's been doing here?" demanded Tommy.

"You missed the biggest sensation of the excursion!" exclaimed George.

"Where are the fellows who busted up the furniture?" asked Sandy.

"You ought to know," replied George. "They ran out just before you entered. It's a wonder you didn't meet them."

"Who are they?" asked Will.

"You remember the two men who came to the window that night?" asked George. "Well, these were the two men!"

"Did one of 'em have his head in a sling?" asked Tommy.

"Sure he did!" was the reply.

"Why don't you sit down and tell us all about it?" asked Sandy.

"That won't take long," replied George. "They came in here something like half an hour ago and began mixing up with the furniture. They searched everything in sight and out of sight, and were about to take up the floor, I reckon, when they heard you coming."

"Did they say what they were searching for?" asked Will.

"Not directly," was the reply, "but I know from expressions I heard that they were searching for the Little Brass God."

"The Little Brass God?" repeated Will. "Why, they've got it now!"

"You bet they have!" Tommy joined in.

"How do you know they have?"

"Because we saw them have it in the cavern!" answered Will. "They were in that cavern not more than five minutes before we left the hills. They must have hustled to beat us to the cabin and make a half hour's search before we arrived."

"I think we've all got a lot of guesses coming," Sandy observed.

"Yes, but what I can't get through my head is why those fellows should be searching through the cabin for the Little Brass God when they have it in their possession," Will said.

"You're sure they had it?" asked George.

"I saw them have it in the cavern earlier in the evening," was the reply. "When we went to try to make them give it up, they vanished as if they had gone up in the air!"

The boys began straightening things in the cabin, and Sandy busied himself in the corner where the provisions were stored.

"I'd like to know where that Indian went," Thede said, as he assisted Sandy in preparing some of the game which had been caught early the morning before. "He won't go far away, I'm thinking."

Before the words were off the boy's lips the door was pushed gently open and Oie looked in. He

made a gesture asking for silence and went out again, softly closing the door behind him.

"That's a funny proposition!" whispered Tommy. "Why don't he come in and get some of the supper Sandy is getting ready?"

The door opened again, then, and Antoine staggered inside. His face was bloodless and his eyes seemed starting from their sockets. His clothing was slit in places as if he had been attacked with a knife, and he staggered about while searching for a chair.

Will sprang forward to the man's assistance, helped him to a chair, and poured a cup of strong coffee, which the man drank greedily.

The man's eyes roved wildly about the room for a second then he turned anxiously to Will.

"Did they get it?" he asked.

"Did they get what?" asked the boy.

"What they came to search for."

Will turned inquiringly toward George.

"Did they find anything during their search?" he asked.

George shook his head.

"They hadn't concluded their search," he replied.

"Then they failed to find the Br——"

There was a movement at the window followed by a rifle shot.

Antoine sitting before the fire by George's side crumpled up and dropped to the floor, a stream of blood oozing from his temple.

Before the lads could quite comprehend what had taken place, a second shot came from outside. Then Oje's face appeared in the doorway again, beckoning to those inside.

Tommy and Sandy stepped into the open air and were directed around to the rear of the house.

There, face up in the moonlight, lay the man whom Will had described as an East Indian. The bandage was still around his head, but a new wound was bleeding now. His eyes were already fixed and glassy. The bullet had entered the center of the forehead.

"He shoot man inside!" the Indian grunted.

"And he killed him, too!" answered Tommy.

Entirely unconcerned, the Indian would have struck off into the forest, but the boys urged upon him the necessity of partaking of food. With a stoical exclamation of indifference, Oje finally followed them into the cabin and seated himself before the open fire.

Antoine was quite dead. The boys straightened his still figure upon the floor and placed by its side the body of the man who had been his murderer.

"We must give them decent burial in the morning," Will decided, "and in order to do so, we must keep them away from the wild animals of the wilderness tonight.

There was a hushed silence for a long time in the room. The boys involuntarily turned their eyes away from the two inanimate objects which had so recently possessed the power of speech and motion.

Presently Sandy saw something glistening at the breast of the dark man. Where his heavy coat of fur dropped back the boy thought he distinguished a gleam of gold. Thinking that it might possibly be some trinket calculated to reveal the identity of the man, Sandy advanced to the body and threw the coat open.

There was the Little Brass God!

"We didn't have to find it," Tommy said slowly after a short pause. "The fellow brought it to us!"

Will took it into his hand and made a careful examination of it.

"Do you think this is the one we are after?" he asked.

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Sandy. "You don't think there are two Little Brass Gods, do you? One seems to have kept us pretty busy!"

"I've heard of their traveling in pairs," Thede suggested.

"Is this the man who made the search of the house?" asked Will of George.

"That is one of them!" was the reply. "The other seemed to be a man in the employ of this man. He was dressed like a trapper and acted like one. They quarreled over some suggestion made by this man and the one whom I took to be a guide went away in a rage."

"You are sure he didn't find what he was looking for?"

"Dead sure!"

"Then there are two Little Brass Gods!" insisted Tommy.

"Yes, and I guess the one we want is the one we haven't got!" Will said.

"I don't see how this fellow could have the one containing the last will of Simon Tupper," Tommy argued. "Can you open the tummy of the Little Brass God, Will?" asked Sandy.

"Mr. Frederick Tupper showed me how to do the trick," Will answered.

"Then why don't you see whether this is the right

one or not?" asked Sandy. "If you can open it, it's the one; if you can't, it isn't the one!"

"Wise little boy!" exclaimed Will taking the ugly image into his hands again.

He pressed here and there on the surface of the Little Brass God, touching now a shoulder, now a foot, now the top of the head, for all the world like one operating the combination of a safe.

"You see," he said, as he continued his strange employment, "the shell of the image is not very thick and when I press on certain parts, certain things take place on the inside."

He put his ear to the side of the image and listened intently.

"There!" he said. "You can hear a click like the dropping of a tumbler when I press here at the back."

"If the combination works, then," shouted Tommy, "it must be that we have the Little Brass God holding the will."

"It works all right enough," Will replied.

With the final pressure on an elbow Will turned a foot to the right and the Little Brass God opened exactly in the center.

But no will was found in the cavity. Instead a mass of diamonds, emeralds, pearls, rubies, amethysts glittered out upon the floor.

The boys stood looking at the shining mass with wide open eyes.

"There must be a million dollars there!" Tommy said almost in a whisper.

"I wasn't thinking of that!" Will said. "I was thinking that, after all our labor and pains, we have unearthed the wrong Brass God."

"But we've just got to find the right Brass God," Sandy insisted.

"Yes, and we'll have a sweet old time doing it!" exclaimed George. "The poor fellow who lies dead there searched every bit of space inside the cabin, yet he didn't find it!"

"But it may not be anywhere near the cabin!" exclaimed Will.

"If we knew whether Antoine ever had it in his possession," Tommy said, "we'd know better where to look."

"Of course he had it in his possession!" said Sandy. "I'm sure he's the man who took it from the pawnbroker's shop on State street. Now let's see," the boy went on, "what were the last words he spoke?"

"He started in to say Brass!" replied Will.

"Then you see, don't you, that that proves that he knew all about it?"

"Yes, and he asked if they found what they were looking for," Tommy contributed, "and that shows that the Little Brass God he brought from Chicago is some where about this palatial abode."

Chapter XXII

THE TWIN BRASS GODS

Oje, who had been sitting by the fire, waiting for his supper, long delayed by the rush of events, now arose and took the Little Brass God into his dusky hands.

"Have you ever seen one like that before?" asked Will.

The Indian shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the body of Antoine.

"Dead man have one!" he said.

"Like this?" asked Will.

The Indian grunted an assent.

"Then I'll tell you what took place, boys," Will said. "When Antoine shot Pierre, he came here and took possession of the cabin and provisioned it. He had had the Little Brass God in the cavern where George and Thede saw it, and he thought a safer place for it would be the cabin."

"So he moved in here and hid it!" Tommy went on. "And we boys chased along and drove him out into the wide, wide world. Now the question is whether he took the Little Brass God back to the cavern or whether he left it hidden about the cabin."

"It's a hundred to one shot," Sandy observed, "that this dead East Indian knew that the image he sought was in or about this cabin. The first night we came here he prowled about looking for it and tried to get one of us boys into a hypnotic trance.

We don't know how many times he has been back here since that night."

"But who sent the fellow up here after the Little Brass God, anyway?" asked George. "How did he come to get on the track of the ugly little devil."

"I guess that's something we'll have to find out in Chicago," replied Will. "All we know is that Antoine was scared to death of him, as shown by his sudden flight from the cavern when he looked in and saw the East Indian and his guide standing looking out at him."

"And they chased him clear up to our burning tree!" Thede cut in.

"That's a fact," Sandy replied. "That dusky faced chap certainly had Antoine buffaloed!"

"Well," Will went on, "the East Indian kept returning to the cabin and Antoine kept returning to the cabin, so it's a pretty safe bet that the Little Brass God we seek is here. Besides, the fact that Antoine asked if the East Indian found anything proves that it is in or about the cabin."

"Well, we're going to find it if we tear the cabin to pieces," Tommy said. "As Will says, it is a sure thing it is not far away."

There was not much sleep in the cabin that night, and it was a dreary supper the boys ate. Before daylight the Indian lay down upon the floor in a blanket, but the other boys remained awake until morning.

Then they began the search for the Little Brass God. They were satisfied now that Pierre had never had possession of it, that he had been despatched as one familiar with the woods and the ways of Antoine, in the Sigsbee interests to secure it from the

man who had purchased it at the pawn shop. Everything pointed, as has been stated, to Antoine's being the man who had taken it out of Chicago.

The boys searched the cabin for two days until not a sliver of the inside remained uninvestigated. Then, after putting up their tents, they began taking the structure down, log by log.

On the third day they found what they sought in the heart of a rotten log. Antoine had hidden it in a secure place. Will had no difficulty in opening the belly of the little image, and there he found the last will of Simon Tupper, bequeathing his entire property to Frederick Tupper.

"That settles the case, boys, so far as we are concerned," Will said, "and I think we'd better be getting back to Chicago in order to straighten things out."

"You talk about getting back to Chicago like we could take the elevated and get there in an hour!" laughed Sandy. "I guess that you forget that we've got three hundred miles of wilderness to travel before we reach the railroad station!"

"Well, we've got our canoes, haven't we?" asked Tommy.

"Yes," Will answered, "and if we want to use the canoes, we'll have to wait until the river opens in the spring. We can get out on the ice all right, I guess."

At the end of two weeks the boys found themselves at a way station on the Canadian Pacific road. After that it did not take them long to reach Chicago. During the trip down they had rather enjoyed the hunting and fishing. Once or twice they had caught sight of a man whom they believed to be the guide

the East Indian had secured, but after a time the man disappeared entirely and was seen no more. Oje accompanied them part of the way and then, much to their regret, turned back.

The finding of the will, of course, settled the Tupper estate for good and all, and the boys were well rewarded for what they had done.

"There's one thing I'd like to know," Will said, as they sat in Mr. Horton's office after all the adventures of the trip had been related, "and that is where this second Little Brass God came from, and how this East Indian got into the Hudson Bay country in quest of the other Brass God about as quick as we did."

"That has all been explained," the attorney replied. "From your description, Antoine is undoubtedly the man who took the Little Brass God in which we were interested from the pawn shop. The evening papers of that day described the burglary of the Tupper home and referred particularly to the taking of the Little Brass God from the mantle in the library.

"The newspapers said at that time that the taking of the image would doubtless result in the discovery of the burglar. In this, the newspapers were wrong. The burglar has never been brought to punishment.

"On the other hand, however, the taking of the Brass God led to the recovery of two sacred ornaments belonging in a Hindu temple in India. It seems that two prominent Hindus read the article concerning the Little Brass God and made inquiries at police headquarters and at all the pawn shops in the city concerning it. The idols had been stolen years before and these men considered it their duty

to restore them to the temple if in their power to do so.

"They found one of the Little Brass Gods without difficulty, it having been purchased a few months ago by a dealer in antiques. They might have known of the wealth contained in the belly of the idol, but it is certain that the dealer in antiques never did. Of course the East Indians learned all that any one knew concerning the destination of the image taken from the pawnshop, and so one of them, the man who was killed, went north in quest of it.

"So far as Pierre is concerned, it is probable that he was picked up here in Chicago and sent north by Sigsbee. Of course we shall never know the truth of that matter, but it is plain that he is not the man who took the idol from the pawnbrokers' shop.

"Well, that ends the case so far as we're concerned," George replied, "and if you've got any more Boy Scout excursions in view, Mr. Horton, I wish you'd suggest a hot climate for the next one. It seems to me like I never would get warm again!"

"What do you think of the people who live up in the Hudson Bay country all the year round?" asked Mr. Horton. "How would you like to wander around there year after year, as Oje does?"

"Say that Oje's a good Indian!" Tommy exclaimed. "I tried to get him to come on down to Chicago with me, but he said he wouldn't live here on a bet."

"What are you going to do with the two Little Brass Gods and all the precious stones?" asked Sandy.

"I would suggest," Mr. Horton replied, "that the two idols be returned to the Hindu still remaining

in the city, the companion of the one who was killed, and that the jewels be returned with them."

"That's a lot of money to give away," Sandy suggested.

"There's nothing compulsory about it!" laughed Mr. Horton. "If you boys want to run the risk of being chased up by those Hindus until they finally get their hands on the idols, you may do so."

"Not for mine!" exclaimed Thede. "I don't want any dusky East Indians chasing me up!"

It was finally decided to restore the two little Brass Gods with the jewels to the Hindu. Later the body of the East Indian was taken from its grave near James Bay and transferred to his own country.

"There's one little commission I'd like to have you boys undertake," Mr. Horton said, after all the details of the Tupper case had been settled. "There's quite a bunch of trouble down here in a coal mine that I'd like to have you boys look into."

"Is it good and warm down there?" asked George.

"Suppose you walk down a few thousand feet under ground, some day, and make a note of the temperature!" laughed Tommy.

"Of course we want to go!" replied Will.

After a few days in Chicago, the Boy Scouts were off on their travels again. The story of their adventures will be found in the next volume of this series entitled.

"Boy Scouts in the Coal Caverns; or, The Light in Tunnel Six."

The End.

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Boy Scouts on the Great Divide;
or, The Ending of the Trail

Chapter I

A BOY SCOUT CAMP

On a sunny September afternoon two shelter tents stood in a mountain valley, on the south bank of a creek which, miles and miles below, becomes the Sweetwater river.

Above the flap of each tent lifted a yellow pennant, in the center of which a blue beaver stood in an alert and listening attitude, his flat tail outstretched.

A campfire blazed in front of the two tents, and some distance away four bronchos fed noisily on the sweet grass of the valley. Tinned provisions and cooking utensils were scattered here and there in front of the blaze, and four boys wearing the khaki uniform of the Boy Scouts of America were busily engaged in preparing supper.

Those who have read the previous volumes of this series will require no introduction to Will Smith, George Benton, Charley (Sandy) Green, or Tommy Gregory. As will be remembered, they were all members of the Beaver Patrol, Chicago. Will Smith had recently been advanced to the important position of Scoutmaster, and George Benton had been elected to the position left vacant by the advancement of his chum, that of Patrol Leader. Besides carrying the badges of their

offices and their patrol, the boys all wore medals showing that they had qualified in the Stalker, Ambulance, Seaman and Pioneer grades.

After rather striking adventures on Lake Superior and in the Florida Everglades the boys had been persuaded by Mr. Horton, a well-known criminal lawyer of Chicago, to undertake a mission in the interest of a client in whom he had become greatly interested. The lads had already arranged a vacation trip to the Great Divide, and it necessitated only a slight change in their program in order to make the investigation desired by the attorney, who had shown himself their friend on more than one occasion. In fact, the Superior trip had been taken at his expense.

Mr. Horton had presented the request which had changed the lads' vacation plans on the night before they left Chicago, and so no details whatever of the case had been given them. They had been asked to proceed to the city of Green River, in the state of Wyoming, and there secure burros, provisions and tents and travel to the valley lying south and west of Altantic peak.

The noted attorney had informed them on the morning of their departure that, in case further instructions did not reach them by wire before they came to Green River, a messenger would follow them into the mountains with full details, and also a history of the case in which they were to be employed. On this sunny afternoon they were awaiting the arrival of the messenger, no information having been received by telegraph.

The tents had been set up on the previous evening, and the boys did not think it possible that

the messenger could be more than twenty-four hours behind them. While they waited for the supper to cook they watched the country off to the south anxiously.

"Last call for supper!" cried Sandy, spreading a great white cloth on the fragrant grass of the valley. "We can eat out-doors in this country without any danger of people butting in to see what we've got for supper."

"You say it well!" said Will, "but you can't prove it! For instance," he added, pointing to the south, "there's some one coming right now to see what we've got for supper!"

The figure pointed out was that of a tall and slender man who was climbing the slope to the southeast. He carried a long rifle over his shoulder and a cartridge belt was conspicuously displayed about his waist.

While the boys arranged their food on the table cloth, the man approached warily. When he came into the valley in which the camp was situated he turned away to the right as if about to circle the tents and the fire. Tommy stood up with a great slice of bread in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other and waved both at the stranger.

"Come on in!" he shouted. "The eating's fine!"

At this invitation the stranger came forward to the fire and stood for a moment without speaking, gazing at the boys with eyes strained to their utmost in an effort to make them look piercing.

"Thank you very much for the invitation!" replied the stranger. "I've had a long walk to-

day and I'm both hungry and tired! My name is Katz—Joseph J. Katz, and I'm in business in a small way in Denver.

"I bought a burro at Green River," Katz went on, "but lost him twenty miles to the south. He got his foot in a prairie dog's hole or something of that kind and broke his leg so I had to shoot him."

"And you've been walking ever since?"

"Indeed I have!" was the reply. "And I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to extend your hospitality until morning. I have a friend who will be along sometime tomorrow with a couple of light tents and a couple of burro loads of provisions."

"Then you're going to camp in the mountains, I take it?"

"Yes," was the reply. "We're going farther in and take a rest and look for a good sheep valley while we do so."

"You're welcome to remain here until your friend comes in!" answered Will. "We have plenty of provisions."

"Then you are thinking of remaining in the mountains for some time?" asked the stranger. "In that case we may meet often."

"I hope so," replied Will. "We are boys from Detroit having a little vacation from the hills and it will be all the pleasanter if we have congenial company. But sit down and eat. You must be hungry."

Katz fell to with an appetite and Tommy saw that his plate was replenished as soon as it was emptied. While he was eating Sandy and Will

arose from the cloth, excused themselves and passed into one of the tents, where Sandy stood regarding his companion with accusing eyes."

"Say," the boy asked, "are you getting to be such a liar that you just can't tell the truth?"

"What's the matter now?" demanded Will.

"Why did you tell that fellow we were from Detroit?"

"Because he lied to me!" was the rather indignant reply.

Sandy grinned and looked the question he did not ask.

"He told me he was from Denver," Will went on, "and Tommy says he's a Chicago detective. The kid says he saw a detective badge under the fellow's lapel. And I guess Tommy knows a detective badge," the boy continued with a wink. "I should think he would after the fun he's had with Chicago detectives, and the times he's been chased by them."

"You don't suppose he's come on here to pinch one of us, do you?" asked Sandy. "If he has, we'll pitch him into the stream that takes the longest road to Cape Horn."

"Of course not!" answered Will. "For all I know he may be the messenger sent by Mr. Horton."

"Then why should he lie about his home city?" asked Sandy.

"I don't know," answered Will. "He may be the messenger and he may not be. If he is a messenger, he's a fool, because he ought to know without further investigation that we're the boys he set out to find. If he isn't a messenger, he's a

charter member of the Ananias club or Tommy's very much mistaken."

"I don't believe he's a messenger," Sandy answered and the two went out to the fire together.

"I have heard a great many stories of robbery and murder in this country," the boys heard Katz saying to Tommy, "but up to this time I have seen no unlawful acts committed."

"Oh, but they have a stage hold-up or some scrape of that kind every week or two!" replied Tommy with a wink at Will. "We remained over at Green River a couple of days and heard a good many stories about highway robbery. There is said to be gold in these mountains," the boy continued and there is also said to be a band of brigands who lie in wait for treasure hunters."

Katz appeared deeply interested in what the boy was saying. In fact he seemed rather excited, too, and the boys noticed that he reached out one hand to stroke the gun, which lay near his side, as he listened.

Sandy nudged George in the side and whispered:

"I'll bet Tommy's got him scared half to death!"

"I guess that's what the kid's telling him these stories for!" George ventured. "He's always up to tricks like that."

While the boys worked about the camp preparing beds for the night and clearing away the remains of the supper Tommy remained close to the side of the trench, asking of his experiences on the way in and telling many exciting stories of highwaymen, the most of which had origin in his own brain.

"Tommy'll have that fellow so scared that he can't sleep!" Sandy whispered to George.

"Then the fellow shouldn't get scared so easy!"

"I consider it very fortunate for you boys," they heard Katz saying after a time, "that I came along just as I did. If this country is as thoroughly infested with robbers and murderers as you seem to think it is, I may be of service to you before morning."

"Sure!" agreed Tommy. "We may have a battle with outlaws almost any time now! We're glad you're here to protect us!"

"Of course, one man can't fight a whole regiment," Katz went on rather boastfully, "but I'll do what I can to protect you in case the camp is attacked."

"I know you will!" answered Tommy with a sly wink at Sandy. "I knew you were a brave man as soon as I saw you!"

During the evening the boys taking the lead made by Tommy told numerous stories of train-robberies and murders in the mountains as they sat around the campfire. Katz listened attentively to them all and more than once the lads saw him involuntarily reach a hand back to his pistol pocket. On such occasions they nudged each other joyfully.

"I wish something would happen tonight," Tommy whispered to Will as they prepared for bed. "I'd just like to see how this Katz would act under fire. I've a good mind to make something happen!"

"You'd better cut that out!" replied Will. "The messenger we are waiting for may be here

at any time now and we may have to move camp at any time. So we want to rest while we can."

"All right!" Tommy answered reluctantly. "I'm just as anxious to get a good night's sleep as you are."

"Who's going to stay awake?" asked Sandy stepping up to where the boys were talking.

"I don't think it's necessary for anyone to stay awake," cried Will.

"I don't believe we ought to all sleep at once!" Sandy observed. "Not with this stranger in the camp, anyway," he added.

"Aw, the stranger's all right!" Tommy exclaimed. "He's a bum Chicago detective out after some fugitive from justice and he thinks its foxy to lie about his occupation and his residence. Don't you think I know the earmarks of a Chicago detective?" he added.

"You ought to, considering the number of times you've been mixed up with them," laughed Sandy. "You certainly ought to know all about Chicago detectives."

"What makes you so certain this man is a Chicago detective?" asked Will. I haven't seen anything that looks like Chicago about him!"

"Why," answered Tommy, "he's mentioned Harrison street and Desplaines street and Chicago avenue half a dozen times when talking about the police department of Denver! And he's been telling about police boats on the lake and on the North and South branches and giving himself away generally. Of course, he doesn't know we're from Chicago and so he doesn't think it necessary to be careful in his speech."

"All right, time will tell!" exclaimed Sandy.

It was arranged that Will, Tommy and George were to sleep together in one of the tents until midnight while Tommy stood watch, and from that time on, the other boys were to watch two hours apiece. Katz was to have the second tent all to himself.

For sometime after the lads and Katz went to their tents, Tommy sat by the fire listening to coyotes and grey wolves howling off in the mountains. Occasionally a coyote came within a few paces of the fire and set up a howl which must have been heard in the dreams of the sleepers.

Along near midnight the boy heard, very indistinctly, shouts to the west of the ridge which lay to the south of the valley. Still more faintly, return shouts were heard. The men, whoever they were, seemed to be advancing toward the camp. While the boy listened a volley of shots came from the west, followed by hoarse shouts and imprecations.

It now became plain that two horsemen were speeding toward the valley and that the shots which were being fired were directed at them. There was no moon as yet although there would be one later on, and little could be seen of the horsemen who were doubtless seeking refuge in the canons farther to the north, but the heavy breathing of the horses and the creaking of the saddles could be distinctly heard.

"I just went to the tent to wake Katz!" Tommy chuckled, "and saw him sneaking away making flat-footed for the hills!"

CHAPTER II

THE RUNAWAY

The horses came on at a swift gallop, to an accompaniment of rifle shots and the jingling of spurs. Directly they were in the circle of light about the fire, their frightened eyes showing red as they ran. The faces of the riders glared viciously down at the boys, but the weapons swinging threateningly from their hands were not discharged as they dashed through the lighted space and were gone.

"Now what do you know about that?" demanded Tommy, as the horses disappeared in the darkness and the gradually receding hoof-beats showed that they were still keeping their course to the north.

"Looks to me like some one was being chased," observed Sandy.

"It would seem that way to the unprejudiced mind!" added George.

Directly the sound of heavy boots scrambling over broken rocks, accompanied by private and personal opinions of that part of Wyoming, of rocky surfaces, and of midnight expeditions, came to the ears of the listening boys. As the sounds drew nearer they grouped closer together.

"Here comes the boys who did the shooting!" exclaimed Tommy.

"I hope they won't mistake us for the men they're after!" George suggested. "They look like rather tough citizens," he added, as the bearded faces and roughly-clad figures of half a dozen men swept into the firelight.

The men were all heavily armed, and it was clear that they were angry from the top of their heads to the soles of their feet. Three presented guns at the breasts of the boys while the other three stepped closer and began asking questions.

"Sure, we saw the ginks go by!" Tommy answered in reply to the first question. "I reckon they won't have anything to ride in about an hour if they keep up that gait."

"Did they stop or say anything to you as they passed?" was asked.

"I should say not!" replied Tommy. "They went by like Mexicans going to a bull-fight! They showed their guns, but they didn't say a word or do any shooting!"

"What does it mean?" asked Will, approaching the man who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"It means," was the reply, "that those two fellows are wanted down in Sweetwater county for holding up a train on the Union Pacific. A party of officers had them safe at Green River a couple of days ago, but they broke loose in some way and came north."

"It's a wonder they headed straight for our campfire!" Will suggested.

"That's what puzzles me!" the other said. "Until I saw you were only boys, probably out on a vacation, I thought the robbers might be associates of yours."

"I hope they won't think so, too," Will answered. "We expect to stay here two or three weeks, and we don't want to get into any mixup."

"They probably won't trouble you any," the

officer remarked, "as they're undoubtedly headed for the Bad Lands in Big Horn county. If they get into that country we may as well give up the search."

"Well," Will suggested, "they won't have any horses to ride before morning, and you may be able to overtake them after they slow down."

"Oh, we're going to keep on in pursuit!" cried the officer. "But we have little hope of overtaking them. They're probably five miles in the lead right now. They've been riding while we've been walking."

"Why walking?" asked the boy.

"Because they shot our horses," gritted the officer.

After partaking of a midnight supper, including several cups of hot coffee apiece, the man-hunters continued on their way, looking longingly in the direction of the burros as they passed out of the light of the fire.

"Now that's what I call rotten!" Tommy exclaimed as the voices of the men died away in the darkness. "We've just made camp in a place that looks good to me, and here comes a band of train robbers and a delegation of lynchers ready to make us all kinds of trouble."

"I don't see why they should make us trouble," Sandy objected.

"Well, they will just the same," Will broke in. "They'll hang around the hills to the north, and officers will be chasing in after them, and, between them they'll give us a merry little time! If the messenger doesn't come tomorrow, we'll break camp and get into some other locality."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Tommy. "We went to Lake Superior and got into a nest of diamond smugglers, and we went to the Florida Everglades and got into a bunch of swamp outlaws and wreckers, and I've been counting on a nice quiet vacation this trip."

"We surely do have bad luck on our outing trips!" laughed Sandy. "But I rather enjoy the excitement after all!" he added, with a grin.

"Well, you wait until you get a band of train robbers shooting from one side, and a band of cowboys shooting from the other side, and you won't think it's so funny!" exclaimed George.

While the boys talked they heard a rustling in the long grass to the north and east, and directly a figure, crouching low and apparently walking with great caution, appeared in view.

"That's one now!" whispered Tommy.

"That's right!" returned Sandy. "That's one coward!"

"Oh, I see," Tommy whispered. "That's Katz!"

The stranger now approached the fire, swinging his rifle jauntily in his hand and throwing his shoulders back until his body swung forward with a decided strut. He looked from one boy to the other as he came closer, apparently seeking to learn from their expressions exactly what was in their minds. The boys' faces remained perfectly grave.

"It's no use!" Katz said in a moment, putting the butt of his gun down to the ground and leaning on the barrel. "It's no use whatever!"

The boys eyed the speaker suspiciously, but said nothing.

"I followed on as fast as I could!" Katz continued. "But they were on horseback, and I was on foot, so what could I do? Besides, it was too dark that I couldn't see to shoot," he went on.

"Oh, you went out after the robbers, did you?" asked Will, not caring to call the fellow's attention to the fact that he ran away to the north before the riders made their appearance.

"Why, yes!" was the reply. "What else could I do?"

The boys suspected that Katz had returned to the vicinity of the camp in time to hear the officer explain exactly what was going on. They were satisfied that he had not pursued the horsemen at all after they had passed him, but decided not to enter into any argument with him.

"Well," Will said in a moment. "If you'll all go to bed now, I'll sit up until morning. I don't suppose you boys care to be wakened if we have any more midnight visitors?" he asked tentatively.

"You needn't wake me up for any running race!" Tommy commented.

"If it's all the same to you," Katz suggested, "I prefer to sleep the remainder of the night. Of course," he went on, "if you need me for your defence, you need have no compunctions in waking me."

The boys laughed at the idea of calling upon the fellow to assist in defending the camp should necessity arise, and the object of their mirth glared at them suspiciously as he turned away to his tent.

In half an hour the camp was quiet again, with Will sitting in front of the fire reading. The coyotes and wolves, which had been frightened

away by the shooting and the clatter of hoofs, now came forward again, and Will was thinking seriously of taking a shot at a great gray beast when a soft call came from the darkness.

"Hello!" the voice said. "Hello!"

"Come up and show yourself!" returned Will.

"Will you give me something to eat if I come up?"

"Sure I will," replied the boy with a grin. "Meals at all hours, you know! We usually run a hotel where we stop."

"Well you've got a customer right now!" came the voice from the darkness, and the next moment the figure of a lad of about fourteen made its appearance in the glow of the fire.

Will stood regarding the boy with open-eyed amazement for a moment and then swung his hand forward in the full salute of a Boy Scout.

"That's all right!" the strange boy cried. "I'm glad to see that you're a Boy Scout. I mean to be one some day, but I'm only a tenderfoot now! I haven't had any chance for advancement yet."

"What Patrol?" asked Will.

"Beaver, Chicago!" was the reply.

"That's my patrol!" exclaimed Will in amazement.

"You're the scoutmaster," the boy said. "I've seen you in Chicago."

"Strange I don't remember you!" replied Will.

"Oh, I'm only a tenderfoot," was the answer, "and of course, you don't know all the new boys!"

"What are you doing here?" asked Will.

"I'm running away!" was the reply. "You see," the boy went on, "I got tired of living in

Chicago, and sleeping in alleys in summer and warm hallways in winter, so I just made up my mind I'd make a break for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"But how did you come to walk up into this country?"

"I started out to get a job herding sheep," was the answer, "and I kept travelling, and travelling, without getting any job, and so here I am, hungry, and ready to go back to Chicago on the slightest provocation!"

"What's your name?"

"Chester Winslow."

"Well, Chester," Will laughed, "it won't take me long to get you something to eat, and then you'd better go to bed. You'll have to double up with another stranger who came along earlier in the evening, but I guess you can sleep two in a bed, especially as the bed is made up on the ground and you can't fall out."

The boy ate a very hearty supper, and five minutes later Will heard him snoring. When daylight came and the sleepers arose, Katz stumbled out of his tent with angry exclamations on his lips.

"What's doing here?" he shouted. "Have I come into the home of the Forty Thieves? When I went to bed last night I had a police badge, and a rifle, and a revolver, and quite a lot of money! Now I haven't got a thing except the clothes I've got on! What kind of a game do you call this? If it's a joke, it's a mighty poor one!"

Will went to the tent Katz had occupied and

looked inside. There was no one there, and he hastened back to the angry man.

"Where's the strange boy who slept with you last night?" he asked.

"Strange boy?" repeated Katz scornfully. "You can't work that game on me! You boys have taken my property, and you'd better be giving it up! If you don't there'll be trouble!"

"We're not afraid of any trouble from you!" Tommy said, with an angry snort. "If you go to accusing us of stealing your stuff, you'll get your crust caved in!"

Then the boy turned to Will with an interrogation point in both eyes. Will saw the question and answered it.

"Shortly after midnight," he said, "a boy who gave the name of Chester Winslow, his age as fourteen, his rank as Tenderfoot, came here and told a hard luck story about tramping from Chicago. I gave him something to eat and put him to bed with Mr. Katz."

"Then the fellow is a little thief! That's all I've got to say about it!" exclaimed Katz, not quite so aggressive, now that he saw that the boys were inclined to resent insults, and remembering that he had no revolver with which to enforce his demands!

Shortly after breakfast the figures of four burros, heavily laden, and two men appeared at the south, heading directly for the camp.

"There's my associate bringing in the burros and the provisions!" Katz shouted.

"And there's our messenger!" whispered Tommy to Will.

Chapter III

THE CASE IS STATED

"It may be that your messenger has come in with my associate," Katz blustered, as the little caravan came nearer to the camp, "but if I'm not very much mistaken, both men are here to assist me!"

"You must need a lot of assistance!" Tommy said, with a wrinkling of his freckled nose. "You look the part, too!"

"Now see here, young man," exclaimed Katz, angrily. "I don't want any lip from you boys. I've been robbed in this camp, and as soon as my men come up I'm going to know whether my property is here or not!"

"If you try any funny business with us," Sandy cut in, "you'll get your block knocked off!"

"We'll see about that when my men come up!" retorted Katz, defiantly. "I'm not going to submit to being held up by four boys who ought to be spanked and put to bed instead of being permitted to roam about the mountains robbing unwary travellers."

Tommy was about to make an angry reply, but Will motioned for him to remain silent. No more was said until the two men came up with their heavily-loaded burros. Katz was first to address the newcomers.

"Well, Cullen," he said, extending a hand to a short, heavily-built man with a dissipated-looking face, "I'm glad you came in on time. I am also glad that you brought a man in with you, and

plenty of provisions," he added with a look of challenge at the boys.

"Why," replied Cullen, "I don't know anything about this fellow with me. He came out of Green River with his two burros just ahead of me, and so we decided to travel together. I should judge from what he said that he's looking for the camp we have just blundered into."

Katz stepped back as if annoyed at the statement, and finally drew Cullen away to one side, where they engaged in a whispered conversation.

In the meantime, the messenger advanced toward Will and extended a sealed envelope. He was a well-built young fellow with a clean-shaven face which gave every indication of intelligence and determination.

"I guess you're the boys I'm looking for," he said, with a smile, "I'm John Johnson, of Chicago, special messenger at this time for Mr. Horton."

"We're glad to see you," Will answered, shaking the young man's hand heartily. "We have been waiting for instructions, and, besides," he continued, "this cheap skate that you found here is trying to make us trouble over something which took place in the camp last night."

"You think he's a cheap skate, do you?" Johnson asked, with a significant smile. "Well, I don't think anything about it. I know it. That's Joe Katz, one of the rankest plain-clothes policemen on the Chicago force! The fellow who came in with me is Ed. Cullen, another imitation detective. Now tell me what took place last night."

Will related the story of the arrival of the boy and of the claim made by Katz in the morning.

He explained how the detective had threatened them all when the loss of his property was discovered. Also, how he had renewed his threats when he believed that he would have the backing of both newcomers. Johnson smiled at the recital.

"Now, about this boy," he said, without referring to the two detectives or the threats. "I wish you would describe him to me as accurately as possible. Tell me exactly how he looked and how he talked."

Will gave as complete a description of the boy as possible, and also repeated the account the lad had given of himself. Johnson threw back his head and laughed until the echoes came back from the mountains.

"Well, boys," he said, "you seem to have lighted in a hornet's nest the first jump out of the box. And so the kid stole the detective's badge and weapons and money, did he?" he went on, with another roar of laughter. "That's about the best thing I've heard yet!"

"I don't see anything funny about it!" replied Will.

"You will directly," replied Johnson. "Read your instructions, and then I'll tell you all about this boy, and all about these two imitation detectives. Then you'll see how funny this incident is."

Will opened the sealed envelope and held up a sheet of paper which was entirely blank, except for eight words and a signature written in the middle of the page. The words were:

"Introducing Mr. John Johnson. He'll tell the story."

The signature was that of the famous criminal lawyer who had induced the boys to undertake the mission to the Great Divide.

"It won't take very long for me to read the instructions," Will laughed, as the other boys gathered around him. "It seems to be up to you to tell us what we want to know!"

"Yes, that's the idea!" replied Johnson. "Mr. Horton explained to me that he didn't care to put what he had to say to you into writing. But perhaps we'd better get rid of these imitation fly-cops," he added, nodding his head toward the two Chicago detectives. We don't want them hanging around the camp while we are making our plans."

Katz and Cullen saw that they were being regarded with suspicion and at once came forward to where the boys stood.

"I've been talking the matter of the robbery over with Cullen," Katz said, with a smile intended to be conciliating, "and he says that he's heard of this boy before, and that he's a noted thief. And so," the detective continued, "I'm very glad to be able to apologize to you for anything I might have said at a time when I was excited over my loss. I am satisfied now that you boys are friendly to me, and I sincerely hope that we'll often meet while we are in the hills."

Tommy was about to make some angry reply, as the insincerity of the man was plainly discernible, but Will gave him a nudge in the back which caused him to change his mind.

"And now," Cullen began, "that everything is satisfactorily explained, perhaps we'd better be on our way!"

"That's a fact!" exclaimed Katz. "I'm very much obliged to the boys for their friendly shelter and their well-cooked meals, and I hope they'll all come and partake of our hospitality as soon as we make permanent camp. We'll take steps to let you know where we are," he added, as the two turned toward their burros and led off to the north.

Tommy could not give over the thought of landing an irritating observation as the men walked away by the side of their beasts.

"Remember," he cried, "that the two train robbers and the cowboy viligance committee went in that direction last night! You fellows would better watch out, or you'll get mixed up with hold-up men!"

Katz turned an angry face toward the boy, muttered something to his companion, and went on without speaking.

"Those fellows won't dare to sleep a single night after that!" laughed Johnson. "They're scared right now!"

"I don't know anything about Cullen," Tommy answered with a grin, "but I know that the man Katz is a false alarm. You should have seen him take to his heels last night, when the train robbers rushed through the camp. I'd like to know what he's in here for, anyway!"

"That's the very thing I'm here to expiain!" replied Johnson. "The story," he continued, "be-

gins with the death of Thomas T. Fremont, a Chicago banker, some weeks ago."

"I remember the case," Will interrupted. "The police declare that the man was murdered, while his relatives insist that he might have committed suicide."

"That's exactly the point," Johnson went on. "The police are working on the theory that Fremont was murdered at his private room at the bank one hot night in July. The relatives declare that there was no reason whatever for him to have committed suicide, yet they insist that he must have done so. Now, understand me," Johnson continued, "the relatives are all interested in the defense of a disinherited son of the banker who is charged with the crime of murder. And so, you see, when the police ask them to point to some one fact substantiating the suicide theory they are unable to do so.

"The result of this peculiar situation is that the police insist that the relatives are advancing the suicide theory solely for the purpose of securing the acquittal of the son. To the average citizen, it would seem that the police are right. The son was always a thorn in the flesh of his father. He has squandered thousands of dollars in riotous living, and brought no end of disgrace on the family whose name he bears. And still the relatives insist that he is innocent, and are willing to spend a million in order to prevent his dying the death of a murderer. Mr. Horton represents the relatives."

"I begin to see daylight!" Will exclaimed. "I

guess this case isn't such a little baby affair as we thought it might be!"

"Indeed it is no baby case!" exclaimed Johnson. "The family of the dead banker have a well-defined theory concerning the death of the old man which might help their case with the police if they would only present it to the chief. This, however, they refuse to do, declaring that the police would only take advantage of the confidence and use the information received to the prejudice of the prisoner."

"I don't blame them for doubting the honesty of the police!" declared Tommy. "The detectives are certainly a bum lot!"

"This theory," continued Mr. Johnson, "insists that there was a second person in the private office of the banker that hot July night. It is claimed that this person went to the office to secure financial help from the banker. It is said, too, that he possesses at this time positive proof, in the form of written documents, showing that Fremont committed suicide. The family believes this proof to be perfect."

"Then why don't they find this fellow and bring him forward?" asked Will.

"That is just what they are trying to do," replied Johnson. "That is just what you boys are expected to do!" he added with a smile. "You are expected to bring this witness forward, and so establish the innocence of the son. That's what you're here for."

"That's nice!" exclaimed Tommy. "That's an easy little undertaking for four school boys! When other means fail, hire Boy Scouts!"

"That's right!" replied Johnson.

"And we won't see him if those two imitation detectives get to him first!" the boy went on.

"And that's right too," Johnson answered. "For my part, I can't understand how the Chicago police department got wise to the whereabouts of Wagner at this time. When it was arranged to send you boys out here in quest of him, it was understood that the police had no clue whatever as to his whereabouts. In fact, we all believed that the officers had abandoned the search for the escaped convict."

"Well, they're here all right!" Sandy cut in. "And look here," he went on, "we've got something worse than imitation detectives in our midst! We've got a couple of train robbers, and a band of cowboy vigilantes!"

"Exactly!" Johnson agreed. "And you've got something equally dangerous for the purposes of our cause. You've got that fourteen-year-old Chester Winslow, whose name isn't Winslow at all, but Chester Wagner, son of the escaped convict!"

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed Tommy. "That boy didn't do a thing to Will, did he?" he added with a roar of laughter. "He told him a story about coming in on blind baggage, and sized up the camp, and stole the badge and the weapons and money of the detective sent in here to capture his father. Just think of the kid coming in here and stealing the detective's badge! He'd have taken his necktie if he'd 'a' thought of it!"

"I thought you'd see something humorous in the occurrence as soon as you found out about the boy!" laughed Johnson.

"The little rascal!" shouted Sandy. "The nerve of him! To come in here and steal the badge of the detective sent out to catch his father! Say," he went on, "I hope we'll run across that boy and make friends with him. I rather like his grit!"

"You won't be apt to find him as long as he thinks it necessary to keep his father in hiding!" Johnson suggested.

"He's an awful little liar!" exclaimed Will.

"I guess you'd lie, too," laughed Tommy, "if you had the same motive for lying that he had. "He's standing by his father like a brick! And I won't lay it up against him if he tells lies enough to fill a book! He drew one friend in me when he stole that policeman's badge."

"These detectives," Will asked in a moment, "are here to take Wagner back to the penitentiary if they can find him, I suppose?"

"That's the idea! Unless some one of the relatives has leaked, the police do not understand that Wagner is a factor in the Fremont case. They are here to take him back to the penitentiary if they can find him and that's all they know about it."

"Well," Tommy exclaimed, "let them get him and take him back to the penitentiary! As soon as he gets run in for the remainder of his sentence he'll tell about being in the banker's private office that hot July night, and that will secure the release of the boy who is charged with the murder. It seems to me that the police are helping along this case."

"Not so you could notice it!" replied Johnson.

"The fact is," he went on, "Wagner is entirely innocent of the crime for which he was convicted. He has had what the officers call a vindictive grouch on ever since the day he was sent to prison. In other words, he is at war with every person in the world except his son, the boy who told you such pretty fairy stories last night. If he is ever retaken and sent back to the penitentiary, he will never open his lips, not even if the accused son dies on the scaffold."

"And that's another beautiful little complication!" exclaimed Sandy.

"The friends of the accused man," continued Johnson, "must find Wagner and contract to establish his innocence. If the police get him first, we lose our case. I say this positively because there is no doubt that he will kill an officer or two before he is taken. Now you boys see exactly what you have undertaken to do."

"It's interesting, anyhow!" Tommy declared.

"Reads like a novel!" cried Sandy.

"Think of that little rat coming here and stealing the detective's badge!" laughed George. "It's a sure thing he'll lead those amateur officers a merry dance while they are in the hills! If I could just get hold of him, I wouldn't mind helping him along now and then!"

"Well, get hold of him then," advised Johnson.

"But how?" asked Will. "Why, from this time on, you might as well try to catch a flea in a load of hay as to get your hands on that boy! He can find you, but you can't find him!"

"But he was hungry last night!" Tommy explained. "And he may become hungry again!"

Chapter IV

A CHASE IN THE NIGHT

Shortly after dinner Johnson decided to make a start on his return trip at once. It would take him, he said, two days in addition to the half day to reach Green River, and he was due in San Francisco on the evening of the third day. One of the burros was relieved of his burden of provisions and the young man started away, leaving the boys feeling rather lonely and also rather overloaded with responsibility!

"Do you really think Wagner and the boy are out of provisions?" asked Tommy as twilight settled down over the camp.

"I don't see how they can procure provisions," Will suggested.

"We've just got to find out!" exclaimed Sandy. "You must remember," he continued, "that this Chester Wagner is a Tenderfoot in the Beaver Patrol, Chicago. He's afraid of us, but we've just got to help him out! We wouldn't be good Boy Scouts if we didn't! Suppose we put up a smoke signal for help and see if he'll come."

"Oh, yes, he'll come—not!" exclaimed Tommy.

"We can try it, anyway," insisted Sandy.

The lad carried embers from the campfire a short distance to the west and built another roaring fire. Then he set about gathering green grass in order to make a greater volume of smoke.

"You'll have to hurry with your telegraph ap-

paratus," laughed George, "if you want the boy to read your signal by daylight. It'll be so dark in half an hour that he couldn't see a column of smoke fifty feet away! Perhaps he isn't near enough to see them, anyway!"

"If I do all I can," Sandy declared, "I won't be to blame if he doesn't see them. I believe we ought to find some way to help that kid!"

The fires were now burning at a great rate, and Sandy heaped huge armfuls of green grass on top of the blazing sticks, with the result that two great columns of white smoke lifted to the evening sky.

When the grass burned out and the smoke became thinner the boy put on more and sat listening patiently for some sound, watching intently for an answering signal from the hills.

"I guess it's no good!" Sandy declared, mournfully, as the third supply of grass burned down. "The chances are that the train robbers and the imitation detectives have frightened Wagner and the kid out of the hills."

"I don't believe he'll come if he does see it," Will declared.

After a time the boys permitted one of the fires to die out and began preparations for supper. Tommy went back to one of the tents for the knives and forks directly, and in a moment came rushing back without any knives or forks but with a folded paper in his hand.

"Look here," he exclaimed excitedly, "while I was entering the tent something hit me a clip on the back. When I turned around to see what foolishness you fellows were up to, I found a piece

of rock lying on the ground at my feet and close beside it, this piece of paper."

"Do you think the paper was wrapped around the rock?" asked George.

"Of course it was!" replied Tommy. "You can see the folds now, and there's the place where a a corner of the rock cut a hole!"

Will turned a searchlight on the paper, now held outstretched in Tommy's hands, and burst into a laugh as he read the words written there:

"Nix on the help signal."

"The little rascal!" exclaimed Tommy, reading the sentence.

"He's wise, that boy!" declared Sandy.

"He thinks we're setting a trap for him," Will explained, "and I can't say that I blame him much for sending just that kind of a message."

"Anyway," Tommy went on, "it shows that he isn't far away. If he'll only hover around within reaching distance, we'll soon convince him that we don't mean him or his father any harm."

"I wonder if he took any provisions with him when he ran away this time!" laughed George. "I really hope he did. That is, if they haven't got any in their own camp."

The boys looked at the provisions which had been taken out for supper, and discovered that two loaves of bread and several tins of preserved meats had been taken.

"Good for him!" shouted Tommy.

After supper it was arranged that two of the boys should watch the camp until one o'clock, and then awake the others, who were to stand guard

until morning. Tommy and Sandy were to take the first watch.

"I don't think there's much use of anyone standing guard!" exclaimed Will. "Our lovely burros over there will probably lift up their voices if any stranger comes nosing around in the dark."

"Anyhow," Tommy suggested, "we may be able to get sight of young Wagner if we keep watch all night."

Will and George were in bed by nine o'clock, and then Sandy and Tommy began planning the excursion into the hills which each one, independent of the other, had determined to make.

"Now it's just this way," Tommy began, "wherever those fellows are, they have a fire. It's September, but the nights are cold here, just the same. Now, you remain here and watch the camp and I'll make my way to one of the summits to the north and take a peep over the country. If I see a campfire, and it isn't too far away, I'll sneak down and see whether it belongs to Wagner, to the cheap detectives, to the train robbers, or to the cowboy vigilantes."

"That's quite a collection of interests to be assembled in one spot on the Great Divide!" laughed Sandy.

"Oh, we always get into some kind of a mess like this," grumbled Tommy. "We could have a nice peaceful time catching Wagner if the detectives, and the train robbers, and the cowboys had remained away. I hope the cowboys will catch the robbers and lug them out, anyway!"

"I have an idea that the detectives will soon get tired of wandering around in the hills and

meeting grizzly bears, and rattlesnakes, and wolverines every half hour."

"Grizzly bears!" exclaimed Tommy. "What are you talking about grizzly bears for?"

"There are more grizzly bears in Wyoming," declared Sandy, "than in all the other western states put together. The Bad Lands are full of them, and up in the Yellowstone National Park, they have them trained to eat with a knife and fork!"

"All right!" exclaimed Tommy. "I'll take your word for it, but I don't believe it! I know there are rattlesnakes, all right, but I don't believe there's a grizzly bear within a hundred miles of this spot!"

The words were hardly out of the boy's mouth before a rumbling growl came to the ears of the watchers.

"There!" cried Tommy. "You've called the roll and that's the first response. But I'll bet he's the only one around here!" the boy added.

Sandy laid a hand on his friend's shoulder to invoke silence.

"Listen," he said, "that's no bear!"

"Perhaps it's a rattlesnake, then!" scorned Tommy.

"It's a boy!" declared Sandy. "That's what it is!"

Both lads darted into the darkness, waving electric searchlights as they advanced, and calling out in such words as a Boy Scout would be apt to understand. They ran for some distance, until they fell over a bit of rocky ground, and then

stood looking toward a point in the darkness from which a sound of footsteps came.

"You go on back to camp," whispered Tommy to Sandy, "and make all the noise you can going, and talk to yourself, so he'll think we're talking together. I'll put out my light and follow that chump by the noise he makes. I guess I can do it all right!"

"Aw, let's both go," pleaded Sandy.

"One's got to go back to camp to put him off his guard!" insisted Tommy. "Run along, like a good little boy, now," he added with a grin.

Sandy departed, talking to himself, and trying his best to make noise enough for two boys, while Tommy turned off his light and crept forward in the darkness in the direction of the sounds he had heard.

For a time he seemed to gain on the person who was making his way some hundred yards or more ahead of him, but at last, try as he might, the sound of footsteps gradually died away, and there were only the sounds of the night in the boy's ears.

He paused, after a time, and threw himself down on the rocky slope. The campfire seemed to be a long distance away, now, and the boy had just decided to give over his search at that time and return to the camp.

When he started to rise, however, he found a heavy hand pressed down on either shoulder. His amazement was so great that for a moment he sat perfectly still.

But there were cowboy vigilantes, train robbers, and detectives somewhere in the hills, so the boy was not quite so sure of the personality of the

other as he had been at the first instant of contact.

"Well?" he said in a moment.

"Who are you?" came the question, not in the voice of a boy, but in the gruff tones of a man who was taking no pains to make a good impression.

"A boy from the camp down yonder," Tommy answered.

The boy was thinking fast. This might be one of the detectives, or it might be one of the train robbers, or it might be one of the cowboys, or it might be the escaped convict himself.

"What are you boys camping there for?" was asked.

"Vacation!" was the reply.

"Which way did the cowboys go?" was the next question.

Tommy needed no further introduction to the man who was clinging to his shoulders with a grip that was positively painful. No one but the train robbers would be apt to be interested in the direction taken by the cowboys. Tommy declares to this day that he felt the hair rising straight up on his head when he realized that he was talking with one of the hold-up men. He also says that his teeth chattered with fright.

"The last we heard of the cowboys," he answered, "they were going straight north. I thought you went that way, too," he added.

"We couldn't get too far away from our base of supplies," replied the other with a cynical laugh. "We were just thinking of going back to your camp for a square meal when we heard you blundering up the slope. You'll have to feed us for a few days, young fellow!"

Chapter V

A DETECTIVE AND A ROBBER

Half way back to the camp, Sandy crouched down at the sound of approaching footsteps.

"I'll bet that's Tommy trying to give me a scare," was the boy's thought.

He listened intently for a moment, without hearing a repetition of the noise, and started on again.

"If I thought that really was Tommy," he mused, "I'd arrange a neat little surprise for him. He's always up to his tricks."

The sound of heavy breathing came to his ears directly, and, not having the least doubt that the approaching figure was that of his chum, he waited for an instant until the labored breathing seemed to be passing the spot where he stood and leaped forward.

Much to his amazement he struck a pair of broad, muscular shoulders instead of the slender shoulders of his chum and felt himself in the grasp of a pair of powerful hands.

"What are you prowling around in the night for?" was asked.

Sandy pulled away at the hand which was smothering him and taking the hint, his captor released him for a moment.

"I can't talk with my mouth and nose all stopped up!" returned the boy. "What did you want to go and do that for?"

"What are you prowling about in the night for?" repeated the other.

Sandy thought he recognized the voice as that of Katz, the plainclothes policeman who had lied on the previous evening regarding his residence and his calling.

"I might ask the same of you," replied Sandy, mopping his face with his handkerchief. "What are you prowling around for?"

"Keeping an eye on your camp," replied the other gruffly.

"What for?" demanded Sandy.

"Because you're suspicious characters.

"You're Katz, aren't you?" asked Sandy.

"Who told you that?" snarled the other.

"John Johnson," was the reply.

"I recognized him as one of Horton's men," declared Katz.

"That's what he is!" Sandy answered.

"What has Horton got to do with you?"

"That's some more of our business!" replied the boy.

"Now, look here," the detective said in a moment, "we're here, as you probably know by this time, in search of an escaped convict. We have positive information that he is hiding somewhere in this district. We have brought in plenty of supplies, and intend to remain here until we find him. He's a slippery fellow, but we'll get him yet."

"That doesn't interest me any," suggested Sandy.

"But I'm going to interest you in just about one minute!" declared Katz. "The boy who stole

my property and left your camp in the night is likely to return there at any time. We want that boy. Will you help us get him? If you don't, you're likely to get into trouble yourselves."

"I guess there isn't much chance of his coming back to us!" Sandy answered. "I guess you know that yourself."

"You know who he is?" ask the detective.

"We've been told," was the reply, "that he is the son of the man you're hunting for, but we don't believe it."

"Well, we've made up our minds that he is," Katz went on, "and we've also made up our minds to watch your camp until the boy shows up again. I'll teach him to steal my badge of authority!"

"When you catch him," Sandy requested, "just let us know. We want to see him ourselves. Will you do that?"

"I guess you'll see him before we do," replied Katz, gruffly. "And now, if you don't mind," the detective went on, "I'll just go over to the camp with you and see what the other boys say about him. And while I'm there, you might make me a couple of cups of coffee. I'm a long distance from my camp and quite hungry."

Notwithstanding the impudence of the request, the boy consented to the arrangement and the two were starting away together when the sound of approaching footsteps was heard.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Sandy. "This deserted country seems to me about like the corner of State and Madison streets tonight. There's always some one walking around in the dark."

"Suppose we wait and see who it is," suggested the detective.

Now, Sandy had an idea that one of the persons approaching was Tommy and that the other might possibly be Chester Wagner. He had no notion of assisting the detective to get his hands on the boy, and so hung back when Katz would have stepped forward to intercept those who were advancing toward him. Thinking this an attempt to break away, Katz caught the lad by the arm and held fast to him while the others went by.

Sandy was certain that he heard Tommy's voice as the two passed, but was not certain that he recognized the voice of his companion in the low reply which was made. The boy realized that he must have occupied considerable time in his return to camp, after leaving his chum.

"And so, one of your chums was prowling around in the darkness, too," snarled the detective. "Who is that person with him?"

"I don't know," answered Sandy.

"Yes you do know, too!" gritted Katz. "You just came from that direction yourself, and you probably left the two together when you came away."

"You're off there," Sandy answered.

"I'll tell you what I think," the detective went on, "and that is that you boys have been out after that Wagner kid. I believe he's going into the camp with your chum right this minute. Anyway, I'll take you in and find out about it!"

As the two advanced toward the campfire, they watched in vain for the two figures which had gone on ahead.

"You walk in there and see whether that boy thief is there or not," commanded the detective. "And remember," he went on, threateningly, "that I'm waiting here in the darkness with an automatic revolver in my hand, so you'd better not attempt any funny business!"

When he reached Tommy's side he saw that the boy was frying bacon and eggs and making coffee. The large skillet used by the boys contained at least half a dozen eggs and about half a pound of breakfast bacon.

"Where's your friend?" Sandy asked in a whisper.

Tommy laid a finger on his lips as a request for low-voiced conversation. All the time he kept busy with the skillet.

"He's back there watching us with a loaded automatic in his hand," whispered the boy. "I wish one of the boys would get up and put a bullet through his head. That's what he deserves!"

"Who is it?" whispered Sandy.

"One of the train robbers!" was the startling reply.

"Where'd you get him?"

"He geezled me out here on the slope!"

"And came in with you and ordered his dinner?"

"That's it!" was the reply.

Sandy sat down on the grass beside the fire and chuckled until he was red in the face. Tommy almost permitted the bacon to burn while he watched his chum with wide-open eyes.

"If that train robber should send a bullet out this way, you wouldn't think it was funny!"

Tommy declared. "He's a mighty suspicious fellow. He wouldn't permit me to wake any of the boys to help get supper."

"Look here," whispered Sandy, "I've got that imitation detective out there waiting for me to tell him whether Chester Wagner is here or not. He says he's hungry, too, and insists that I give him a night lunch. Now I'll tell you what we'll do," the boy continued. "I'll go and steer the detective up against the train robber, and we'll see what he'll do."

Before Tommy could reply, Sandy was away in the darkness, whistling softly to the detective.

"Say," he said, when Katz came lumbering into the edge of the illumination, "the boy isn't there, but I've got good news for you, just the same. The man who went in with my chum is one of the train robbers the cowboys are in search of. There's ten thousand dollars reward offered for him, and all you've got to do is to walk in there, hold a gun to his head, and march him off to Green River. You ought to give me half the reward, though, the boy added, "for you wouldn't have caught him only for me."

"All right," whispered the detective in a shaking voice. "I'll creep back into the shadows and come up from behind. When you go back, point with your hand to where he is. I'll be right there with a gun on him in half a minute!"

"All right," replied Sandy, and the detective disappeared from view.

Then the boy walked back to Tommy's side and explained what sort of circus there would be there in about a minute.

Chapter VI

THE CALL OF THE BEAVER

"Oh, I don't believe there'll be any circus!" whispered Tommy.

"And why not?"

"Because Katz will get the fellow handcuffed so quick by that there won't be any fun in it! There's a big reward out for that fellow!"

"Huh!" grinned Sandy. "You didn't see how scared the detective was when I told him the train robber was here by our fire. It's a hundred to one that the train robber will give the detective a swift kick in the pants and go back to his own camp."

The boys listened and waited for a considerable length of time, but heard no evidence of the approach of the detective.

"Say," Tommy whispered, "this is a pretty nice supper I've been getting for that robber. It looks good enough for me to eat myself!"

"We can eat it after Katz takes the robber away," suggested Sandy.

"I don't see anything of Katz, do you?" asked Tommy with a wink.

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed Sandy. "You don't think he's run away, do you? He wouldn't do that, I'm sure!"

"He wouldn't" laughed Tommy. "I'll bet that fellow's running away now with a face so pale it leaves a white streak in the night."

"Well, it takes him a long time to get here, anyway," admitted Sandy.

"You just wait a minute," Tommy chuckled, "and I'll fix this business all right. You just tend this skillet until I come back."

Tommy moved away toward where the robber sat on the ground, watching every move that was made, and keeping a particularly keen eye on Sandy, whose temporary absence from the camp had attracted his suspicions.

"Look here," Tommy whispered, "we're not anxious to see you boys get into trouble, and so we're going to give you a tip. Sandy went out a moment ago to steer away one of the detectives who came in from Chicago last night."

The hold-up man got softly to his feet and began moving out of the light of the fire. Tommy urged him by look and a motion to remain where he was for the present.

"I didn't know that there were any detectives from Chicago in here," he said. "They must have made a quick jump to get here!"

"I guess they did," replied Tommy. "One of them was here before you were yesterday. He chased you up the valley, but came back, saying that he couldn't get a shot."

"Pretty nervy kind of a fellow, eh?" asked the train robber.

"He looks to me," declared Tommy, "as if he'd fight a rattlesnake and give him the first bite. He may have a swarm of his men in the vicinity of the camp, and if I were you, I'd turn away to the east and get out of sight as soon as possible."

"I can't fight a whole army," declared the train robber, as, crouching low, he moved away.

"Wait a minute," whispered Tommy chuckling so that he was afraid the other would discover the merriment in his voice. "Why don't you wait and have some of the supper I've been cooking for you?"

The train robber did not even pause to hear the conclusion of the boy's remarks, and Tommy went back to the fire and lay down and rolled back and forth until Sandy threw a cup of water into his face.

"What do you think of that!" he exclaimed. "There's a bum Chicago detective chasing off to the north at a forty mile gait, because he thinks there's a train robber after him, and there's a a train robber chasing off to the east at a forty-mile gait because he thinks there's a Chicago detective after him! Some day," the boy added, "I'm going to make a motion picture scenario of that."

While the boys were enjoying the joke, Will and George came out of the tent where they had been sleeping. Both looked grave when the incidents of the night were related to them.

"It means," Will declared, "that we are suspected by the train robbers of harboring a detective, and suspected by the detective of harboring the convict and his son."

"Aw, they won't come back here again, any of them!" asserted Tommy.

"Don't you think they won't," replied Will. "Here," he added, as Tommy dipped into the skillet of bacon and eggs. "What are you boys doing with the third or fourth supper?"

"I cooked this for the train robber!" grinned Tommy. "How'd you like to have a few bites of it?"

"I don't mind!" declared Will.

"Of the four parties representing four diverse interests," Will said, at the conclusion of the meal, "two have been represented here tonight. Before morning we may receive a call from the cowboys and the escaped convict. The visits might not be very agreeable ones but, still, they would complete the roll-call."

"You remember that trip to the Florida Everglades, don't you?" asked Tommy, with a most satisfying yawn. "Well, if you haven't forgotten all about it, you'll remember that we didn't have any sleep there for a couple of nights, and that I actually began to grow thin because of being kept awake so much."

"It was your own fault," insisted Sandy.

"That may be," replied Tommy, "but, all the same, I'm not going to let anything like that happen on this trip. I'm going to bed right now, and there's nothing on the face of the earth that can get me out of bed again until morning."

"That's me, too!" declared Sandy.

The boys entered the tent recently vacated, drew down the flap and were soon in bed, and asleep. Will and George, sitting by the fire, discussing the unusual combination of circumstances, heard a succession of sounds which any member of the Beaver patrol, Boy Scouts of America, would have recognized instantly.

It was the beaver call which consists in slapping the open palms together violently in imitation of

the play of the flat tail of the beaver upon the surface of the water.

"Slap, slap, slap!" came the challenge from the darkness.

"That's a Beaver!" exclaimed George.

"Slap, slap, slap!" went the reply from Will's open palms.

"Why doesn't he come in?" asked George in a moment.

"I guess I'll have to go and find out!" declared Will. "This, you see," he added with a smile, "is the third interest to be represented here tonight. There is no doubt but that we'll hear from the cowboys before morning. It never rains but it pours."

"Slap, slap, slap!" came the call from the darkness again.

Will gave a low whistle in recognition of the signal and stepped forward. An answering whistle directed his steps, and presently he saw the light of the fire shining on the pale face of the lad who had stolen the badge of office from the detective.

"Why didn't you come on in?" asked Will.

"Why," was the reply, "I wasn't afraid of you boys, but I didn't know who might be watching the camp. I've been loitering around here most of the time since dark and just got the courage to call you out. Some one chased me away once."

"Are you hungry?" asked Will. "If you are, now's the time to say so. Last call for dinner in the dining car!"

"Yes, I'm hungry," was the reply, "but I haven't got time to wait for supper. If you'll snatch a loaf of bread and can of something and

come along with me, you'll do the greatest favor one Boy Scout ever did for another. You'll come, won't you?"

"Sure I will," was the reply, "and I'll bring something more than a loaf of bread and a can of something," he went on.

"You can't carry much," replied Chester, "for we've got a rocky road to climb, and we'll have to go fast, too!"

"You haven't told me what the trouble is, yet!"

"It's father!" the boy answered hesitatingly. "I suppose you know now that I didn't tell you the truth when I was at your camp. I saw John Johnson there after I stole that bum detective's badge and ran away, and I suppose he told you all about me."

"Yes, he did," replied Will, rejoicing inwardly that the very thing they had been wishing for had taken place.

All he had to do now was to win the confidence of the boy, find his way to the father, and so clear up the mystery of the Fremont case.

"Yes," Will went on, "he told me all about you and all about your father, and I've been wondering ever since how you, a Boy Scout, could find the nerve to make up such a mess of lies as you told to me."

"I wanted to find out what you were here for, and who you were, and get something to eat," replied the boy, "and so I told you the first thing that came into my head. And now," he continued, "I'm going to tell you something that I wish might be classed as a fairy tale later on."

"Go ahead," answered Will. "Two days ago I had no idea that I'd ever become mixed up in the Fremont case, but I'll tell you right now that I'm becoming interested in it."

"A few days ago," the boy began, "father fell from a ledge of rock near our hiding place and injured his head. I have taken as good care of him as I could, but it was impossible for me to remain with him all the time, because I had to fish and hunt and provide food for both of us."

"You're welcome to any provisions we have," said Will, feeling genuine sympathy for the boy.

"That isn't the point now," Chester went on. "While I was in your camp last night waiting, for the chance to steal provisions to take back to father, he left the hiding place. I know he's out of his head, and so I believe him to be wandering about the hills in a demented condition. There's no knowing what will happen to him if he is not found and placed in hiding again. I want you to go and help me find him. The detectives who came in last night, or some time yesterday, are here to take him back to prison, and they're likely to get him at any minute if he continues to wander about while insane from the recent injury to his head. There's no one to help me but you. Will you go?"

Here was the very chance the Boy Scouts had been waiting for.

Chapter VII

ARRESTED AS SPIES

"Of course, we'll go with you!" replied Will, in answer to the boy's anxious question. "Do you think anything can be done tonight?"

"I think we ought to begin the search tonight," replied Chester. "One of father's hobbies is the campfire. It is my idea that if he has matches he will build himself a rousing fire, if he comes to dry wood. If he doesn't do this, he's likely to make his way to the first campfire he sees. I was in hopes that he'd come here."

Will called his chums into the tent for a general discussion of the matter, Chester remaining just outside the fire line. The boy seemed to have a mortal fear of being watched and followed.

Before entering fully into the conference, Will carried a liberal supper out to the hungry boy. Chester said that he had eaten very little since disposing of the provisions taken from the camp. Owing to the sudden disappearance of his father, he had not had time to hunt and fish. Will thought he had never seen a boy eat so industriously.

"Why don't he come into the tent," queried Tommy, as Will returned.

"He's afraid some one's watching the camp," was the reply.

"Well, if there is some one watching the camp,"

Tommy insisted, "they'll see something's going on and follow us when we go away with Chester, so he might just as well come on in!"

"Watch us when we go away?" repeated George. "Who do you think is going away with the boy in search of his father?"

"I'm going, for one!" declared Tommy.

"Not so you could notice it!" Will cut in. "You and Sandy have been doing all the scouting tonight, and now George and I will take a turn at it!"

Tommy winked slyly at Sandy but said nothing.

Will, however, caught the look which passed between the two boys, and declared that he meant to tie them both up before he left the camp.

"You boys are always running away, and always getting into trouble!" he declared. "You remember what a scrape you got us into down in the Everglades. If it hadn't been for the Seminole, you'd 'a' had us all under ground before we'd been there two days!"

"Aw, who said anything about leaving camp?" demanded Sandy.

"No one said anything about it," returned the other, "but I understand what you boys have in your minds, and I'll tell you right now that I don't think it's right for you to leave the camp until we return."

"Of course we won't!" declared Tommy.

"Well, I've said all I'm going to say about it!" Will went on. "Of course, you'll go if the notion comes into your heads, anyway, so what's the use? I hope you'll get into something that'll keep you home for a week if you do go out tonight."

"All right," laughed Tommy. "We know all about you! If we got into trouble anywhere, you'd be the first one to help get us out."

"And now about plans for the search," Will went on, without seeming to notice the last remark of the boy, "it is nearly midnight now, and we may not be back by morning, so perhaps we'd better take something to eat with us. We may be miles from camp at sunrise."

"And when we find Wagner, we may find a hungry man," George added.

"That's a fact!" cried Tommy darting away to the provision box.

In a very sort time the boy brought a great package of egg and ham sandwiches to the two lads who were about to start away.

"Now, don't eat all this truck before sunrise," Tommy advised. "As George says, when you find Wagner, you'll find a hungry man."

After stowing the sandwiches away in their pockets, and seeing that their automatics and searchlights were in good condition, the boys went out to the place where they had left Chester and found him sound asleep in the long grass.

"The poor fellow is about all in!" exclaimed George.

"I wish we could get him to remain in camp while we make the search!" Will suggested. "He's in no shape to take a long trip into the mountains."

"And still," George began, "we haven't any idea where to look for his father. And the boy may have a very clear notion as to where to look first. I guess, after all, we'll have to take him with us!"

"I suppose so," Will agreed, "but I tell you

what we can do. We can get him to tell us what he knows about his father's habits and inclinations, and then ask him to rest up while we investigate some of the points suggested. Perhaps he'll do that."

"I guess he'll have to!" smiled George. "He's so sound asleep now that we could carry him bodily into the tent and he'd never know it!"

It was quite a difficult task to wake the boy, but at last when he sat up rubbing his eyes he pretended, as all boys will, that he had just dozed off for a minute.

"I was pretty tired," he declared, "and I guess the supper I ate made me a little bit sleepy."

"Well," Will said, "we may as well be on our way. I suppose you'll take us first to the place where you and your father have been hiding."

"That was my intention."

The sky was clearing now, and the light of the stars made it possible for the boys to walk at a swift pace over the level valley and up the easy slope which led to the top of a low and rocky range of hills lying at the western foot of Atlantic peak.

When the boys finally reached the summit of the ridge, Chester led the way down an incline facing the east to a gulch which ran in between the great mountain and the lower range.

"Here's where we've been stopping," he said, pointing to what is known in that part of the country as a limestone cave. "It's quite comfortable in there if you have a fire near the entrance, and no one can see the blaze from the valley, so it's reasonably safe."

The boys stepped into the cavern and looked

around. A rude couch had been made of the boughs of spruce and white pine, and saplings had been roughly hewn into a table and two chairs.

"You must have been here some time?" asked Will, pointing to the skins on the floor.

"Several long, dreary weeks," was the reply.

"Did you come here with your father?"

"Yes, we came together."

"Were you with him in Chicago just before he left for Wyoming?"

The boy opened his eyes wider.

"How did you know we were ever in Chicago?" he asked.

"We know more about your father and yourself than you think we do."

"Perhaps," said the boy suspiciously, "I have done wrong in asking you for assistance."

"Oh, you've come to the right shop for help," George cut in. "You'll find that we'll help you while you're in the hills, and continue to help you after you get out of the hills. You're a Beaver, you know."

It was on Will's lips to tell the boy exactly why they were there, and how glad they were that he had come to them in his trouble, but he refrained from doing so.

After half an hour's walk they came to the place where the gulch opened into a small valley.

"I think," Chester said, as they stepped into one of these openings, "that father may be hiding somewhere in this vicinity."

"Do you think so," asked Will, "because of that light in there?"

"I didn't see any light when I spoke," replied

the boy, "but I see the reflection of a fire now. It must be some distance from this opening."

The boys moved forward softly until they came near a campfire which was in a passage connecting the cave they were in with one to the north. When they came close enough they saw three figures sitting before the fire. Chester clutched Will fiercely by the arm and declared that one of the men was his father. He was for rushing forward immediately, but the boys held him back.

"If the other fellows are the detectives," George suggested to Will, "it's all up with us, unless we can get him away."

"But they are not the detectives," replied Will. "Those fellows are the men who are wanted for the Union Pacific train robbery!"

While the boys were advancing the three men at the fire disappeared as if by magic! The next moment the circle of light showed the figures of half a dozen cowboys darting hither and thither in search of the men who had taken themselves off so suddenly.

Believing that the cowboys might be induced to assist in the search for the missing man, the boys advanced toward the fire. As they did so the cowboys swarmed down upon them. Before they could utter a word of protest they were securely bound with ropes and dragged to the opening.

"We didn't get the robbers," the man who seemed to be leader of the party said, "but we can amuse ourselves lynching these spies!"

Chapter VIII

A MIDNIGHT BEAR HUNT

"I have heard," Tommy said with a wink, soon after the departure of the boys, "that the best time to get a grizzly bear rug for a Boy Scout club room in Chicago is at moonrise."

"I think I've heard something like that, too," Sandy answered, with a grin. "That is," he went on, "if you want to get a grizzly bear rug for a Boy Scout club room in Chicago in the month of September."

"Yes," Tommy admitted, "I think the month of September was mentioned in the information I received on the subject."

"And the best place to get a grizzly bear rug for a Boy Scout club room in Chicago," Sandy laughed, "is in a range of foot hills built mostly of limestone. You see," the lad continued, "water washes out limestone and leaves caves and holes which the bears occupy. Sometimes these caves and holes furnish accommodation for a whole family of baby bears, I have heard, so we may be able to take a pet cub back to Chicago with us. That would be pretty poor, I guess!"

"Well," Tommy said, rummaging the provision box, "if we start out to get a couple of grizzly bear rugs for a Boy Scout club room in Chicago, we probably won't get back before sunrise, so we

may as well take a little something to eat with us."

"Trust you for always taking something to eat with you!" laughed Sandy. "It's a sure thing you'll never starve to death."

The boys provided themselves with plenty of sandwiches and a couple of cans of pork and beans and, after seeing that the fire was safe and not likely to spread to the tents and provisions, and after changing the feeding ground of the burros so that they had plenty of grass, started away toward the foothills.

"Of course," Tommy said as they walked along, "we may find Wagner while we are looking for bear, and Will and George may find bear while they're looking for Wagner. I've heard of such things before now."

The boys crossed the valley to the foot hills and clambered up the slope not far north of the spot where their chums and Chester had gained the summit. They descended into the gulch, too, and turned to the left.

"Now," Tommy said, seating himself on the slope, "the moon ought to be up in half an hour. I've heard that at the time the moon comes up bears leave their beds in search of food. We'll just sit here on the slope and watch the line of foothills."

"And I suppose," Sandy scoffed, "that you've got a notion in your nut that a couple of grizzly bears will come walking out into the gulch, take off their hides, and make you a present of them in a nice little speech."

"Now don't get smart, Freshy!" exclaimed

Tommy. "According to all accounts, the walls of many of these foothills are punctured with limestone caves. There's where the bears live. From where we sit we can see a long ways to the north, as soon as the moon rises and we may be able to catch sight of a grizzly coming out for an early lunch."

The lads were seated not very far from the entrance to the cavern which had been occupied by Wagner and his son, but they had no knowledge of the fact. It was not their purpose to investigate one cavern at a time, but to watch the valley for anything that might come out of any one of them.

They could see only a short distance when they halted but presently the moon lifted into the sky and diffused a faint light over the hills. It would be some minutes before the direct rays would strike into the gulch, and so the boys waited, hiding in the shadows, for that time to come.

"I guess we've got one already," Tommy observed, whispering the words excitedly in his chum's ear.

"I don't see anything that looks like a grizzly."

"Can't you see that there's a movement in the shadows about a hundred feet to the north?" asked Tommy.

"I see something moving, but I can't tell what it is."

"It's a bear!" shouted Tommy, taking no pains now to control his voice.

"Yes," exclaimed Sandy, "and it's two bears, if anybody should ask you, and they're coming this way!"

"Then we'd better get back a little ways," advised Tommy.

"I should say so!" cried Sandy. "At least we we want to get into a position where they can't get in behind us."

The boys turned back a few paces and sought a position where their backs would be supported by the almost perpendicular wall of the bluff to the west. Then Sandy grinned as he pointed to the south.

"I guess this is a bear convention," he said. "There's another grizzly old scout coming from the other way."

"Three bear rugs," chuckled Tommy.

"Say, look here!" Sandy exclaimed. "Do we stand here and let these brutes come up and smell of our clothes before we do any shooting?"

"We don't do any shooting from here," Tommy answered moving back to the south. "If we should wound those big brutes without shutting off their motive power, they'd chew us into rags in about three minutes. We've got to get some place where we can run!"

"Then what'd you back up against this rock for?" demanded Sandy.

"I didn't know how many bears there were in the world," grinned Tommy.

The boys moved a few paces and stopped at the mouth of a cavern. Tommy threw his search-light into the interior and saw only bare walls. On his right as he looked in, appeared to be some sort of connection with the cave beyond.

"Gee—whiz!" he exclaimed. "There seem to be passages and corridors in this big bear tene-

ment building. I wonder if there isn't an elevator, too."

"I wouldn't mind going up a few hundred feet!" suggested Sandy.

The bears came lumbering along toward the cavern where the boys stood, apparently not much interested in the visitors. When the moon rose they snuffed about the crevices along the slope, and finally fixed their attention on the spot where the boys were standing.

Both boys, realizing that a mistake had been made, dashed into the cavern and kept firing as the animals came into view, rather sharply outlined now against the growing moonlight.

"Now you have done it!" cried Sandy.

"Aw, what have I done?" demanded Tommy. "We came out to get grizzly rugs for our clubroom in Chicago, didn't we?"

"Yes, and you went and fired without killing them, and now we've been chased into a hole! If they've got the sense to stand there and wait for us to come out, they'll have a feast of boy flesh in a few hours."

"Huh!" exclaimed Tommy, "I didn't see you bringing down any of the bears, and you shot as often as I did."

"It sure was bum shooting," admitted Sandy.

The bears were now out of view, but the boys knew that they were still watching the entrance to the cavern. Tommy's searchlight showed the entrance to the connection between the two caverns, and the boys lost no time in changing their position. Tommy looked out at the entrance to the hiding place and saw that the brutes

had shifted their quarters and were watching from a new position.

"I guess we've got into the kind of a mess Will predicted," Tommy declared. "This looks like we'd have to stand a siege."

Tommy moved to the side of his chum and fired a couple of shots at the sentinel outside.

"Look here," Sandy advised. "You'd better save your bullets!"

"All right!" Tommy answered. "I suppose that's what we're here for—to save bullets!"

"Well, you needn't be throwing them away where there's no chance of hitting anything," grumbled Sandy.

Tommy retreated into the cavern and began investigating the wall with his searchlight.

"If we could only find another corridor in this steam-heated old collection of bear traps," he said, "we might get out of sight of the brutes. I wish we could find a hole leading up to the roof!"

The boys finally found a small opening which led into the wall on the south. After investigating and finding that it connected only with the cavern they had just left, the boys turned back.

Tommy, who was in the lead, sprang back when he came to the main cave with a suddenness which almost threw his chum to the floor.

"Now we've gone and done a fine thing!" he cried. "The bears are out there in the cave and we're shut in good and tight!"

Chapter IX

LYNCHING IS THREATENED

"Spies!" repeated Will, indignantly, as the cowboys gathered around.

"Yes, spies!" exclaimed the leader of the party excitedly. "You thought you pulled the wool over our eyes down at your camp the other night, but you didn't! We have good reason to believe that the robbers have visited your camp every day and that you fed them!"

"That isn't true!" declared George angrily.

"If you're not in with these bandits, what are you doing here?" demanded another member of the party.

"Why, we came in search of—"

Will closed his teeth with a snap as he realized that on no account must he reveal the real motive for this night visit to the cavern.

"Go on!" shouted the leader.

Will glanced significantly at George and remained silent.

Chester seemed about to speak, but George gave him a nudge with his elbow and the boy remained silent.

"You said you came here in search of some one!" the leader demanded.

"I didn't say anything of the kind," Will contradicted.

"Well, out with it! What did you say?"

"I was about to say that we were prowling around just for the fun of the thing."

"Prowling around in the ante-room of a robbers' den in the middle of the night just for the fun of the thing!" laughed the leader.

"That story is so bald that it's funny!" laughed another member of the party. "You ought to make up something better than that!"

"It's the truth!" answered George.

"Look here!" the leader exclaimed. "If you boys'll tell us where those three men went to, we'll take you into Green River and see that you have a fair trial. If you don't, we'll string you up right here in the mountains!"

"We don't know where they went!" answered Will.

A member of the party who had been called Seth by his companions now stepped forward and began an examination of the Boy Scout badges which adorned the coats of the two lads.

"Where did you get them?" he asked.

"Chicago," was the reply.

"The Beaver Patrol, I see," the man went on.

"Yes, sir!" replied Will.

"You look like a young man," George cut in. "Were you ever a Boy Scout?"

"Hardly," was the reply, "but I have a son who is very much interested in the organization. He belongs to the Eagle Patrol, at Lander, and I hear nothing but Boy Scout rules, and tactics, and that sort of thing, from morning till night."

"Well, he must be a good lad if he's a faithful Boy Scout," Will suggested. "He certainly must be all right!"

"Indeed he is!" Seth answered. "He's a good boy, and I hope some day that he'll have the right to wear a badge like that," pointing to the Scoutmaster emblem on Will's hat.

"How many of these medals has he?" asked George, pointing to the Ambulance, Stalker, Seaman and Pioneer medals on his sleeve.

"Oh, I don't know," Seth laughed. "He comes home every day or two and says he's going to have a new one! Look here, lad," the man added glancing apprehensively back at his companions, "why don't you tell the truth and get out of this scrape in the easiest possible way?"

"We have told the truth," was the reply, "except that we didn't come out just for the fun of the thing. We came out for a purpose which we can't disclose at this time. We blundered on the train robbers, and have no more idea of where they went than you have."

"Look here, Seth," the leader of the party exclaimed. "If you can't make those boys tell the truth, just cut out this conversation. We've got work to do tonight!"

"I think they are telling the truth!" Seth answered.

"Oh, I guess you know better than that!" laughed the leader. "You're interested in them because they claim to be Boy Scouts, and I suppose you're taking in everything they say."

"I think the boys are all right!" insisted Seth.

"It doesn't make any difference what you think!" replied the other angrily. "If they don't tell the truth, they're going to swing in less than half an hour!"

"I can't stand for that, Pete," Seth answered.

"Who's sheriff of this county?" demanded the man who had been called Pete. "I suppose you think you're boss of this expedition."

"I don't think anything of the kind," was the reply, "but I'm not going to see these Boy Scouts murdered without a hearing, and if you attempt anything of the kind, you'll never be sheriff of this county again! I can tell you that much."

The four other members of the party were now whispering together some distance away. As they whispered, they glanced furtively from the boys to the man who was trying to protect them."

"Look here, Pete," one of them said, as they all stepped forward, "we don't see any necessity for this halt in the proceedings just because Seth has a lad that belongs to the Boy Scouts."

"That's right," another member of the party declared. "Just you say the word and we'll string these boys up in a holy minute!"

"Not with my consent!" exclaimed Seth. "I'm not murdering babies! And if you fellows attempt anything of the kind, there'll be trouble!"

"Look here," the sheriff said, addressing Will. "You boys go off in a corner somewhere and talk this thing over. Here's a pretty decent kind of a fellow, a neighbor of mine, getting into trouble on your account. Now you go and talk the thing over, and see if you can't decide to tell the truth and help him out as well as yourself."

"Why can't you tell him the whole story?" asked Chester as the boys grouped themselves in a shadowy corner of the cave. "Why don't you tell him just why you came out tonight, and

how we happened to come into the cavern. I don't believe they'll do us any harm if you tell the truth."

"Now, look here, kid," Will answered, "if we tell the cowboys that we came into the hills hunting for a demented man, they'll want to know who the demented man is, and why he came into the hills without any supplies. Can't you understand that?"

"If he does," replied Chester, "I'll tell him all about it."

"If you do," Will continued, "the cowboys will join in the search for your father, and when they catch him, they'll turn him over to the two detectives who are now in the hills searching for him."

Chester turned pale as death and shrank back against the wall of the cave. His voice was piteous as he asked:

"So you know all about that, too, do you?"

"Yes," answered Will, "and we don't want the officers to get hold of your father. If they do, it will spoil all our plans, because they'll take him back to the penitentiary, and that would make new trouble for our friend. We want to find him ourselves."

"But I don't understand—"

"I know that you don't understand," Will declared, "and this is no time nor place to give you the information you lack."

"But I'll see father taken back to prison before I'll see you two boys lynched!" insisted Chester.

"You'd better think the matter over carefully,"

Will advised. "The chances are that they won't believe anything we say to them now."

"Well!" the sheriff called out impatiently. "Have you boys reached a conclusion?"

"We have already told you everything which can possibly interest you!" Will answered. "We have nothing more to say!"

"Then bring out your rope, boys!" the sheriff shouted.

Seth threw a hand back to his pistol pocket and faced the sheriff angrily. The sheriff's eyes flashed vengefully.

"I protest against this murder!" Seth exclaimed.

"If you don't want to take a hand in the proceedings, get out!" ordered the sheriff. "We can do the work without you!"

"I don't propose to see these Boy Scouts murdered!" Seth declared.

Every member of the party now held a gun in his hand, and it seemed to the boys that a desperate battle must take place. They drew their own revolvers and stood side by side with their defender.

"Take those guns away from the kids," shouted the sheriff, addressing two of his men. "We ought to have attended to that before this!"

"Don't you try it!" Seth said calmly. "I'll shoot the first man that lays a hand on one of them!"

While the two parties stood facing each other, each ready to begin shooting at the slightest provocation, a volley of shots came from up the gorge. The angry men turned their eyes toward the en-

trance to the cavern and the sheriff threw up his hand in a command for an armistice.

"The train robbers may be out in the gulch shooting up some one now!" he exclaimed. "We ought to see about this!"

"Yes," Seth exclaimed, "there's no use of our coming to blows over this matter. If the robbers' hiding place can be found, we can make them tell whether these boys are mixed up in their affairs or not."

"That's right!" exclaimed another member of the party. "If the boys will give up their guns and promise to make no attempt to escape, we'll investigate this shooting and give them the benefit of every doubt there is in the case. Will you do that, boys?"

The lads handed their weapons to Seth and moved out toward the gulch. When the party passed out of the cavern they found no one in sight. While they stood listening and watching more shots came from the south and they all moved up in that direction. The moon was now shining brilliantly and the whole gulch was in view.

"Strange where that shooting is!" Seth exclaimed.

"It's in the caverns up to the north, and that means that the train robbers have been brought to bay!" exclaimed the sheriff.

As the party started up the gulch, Will drew Seth aside and whispered a few words into his ear.

Chapter X

ONE DANGER TO ANOTHER

"How do you know the bears are out there in the cave?" Sandy asked, as Tommy drew back into the smaller cavity.

"Just take a peek out, if you don't believe me."

Sandy did take a peek out, and sprang back with a face which looked as white as a sheet of paper under the rays of Tommy's electric searchlight.

"One of 'em took a swipe at me!" he said.

The boys turned their searchlights on the entrance and waited patiently for some moments for the bears to present themselves in the illuminated circle, but the animals seemed to understand that there was danger under the light, and remained around the angle of the wall.

"What are you going to do?" asked Tommy, presently.

"Blessed if I know!" answered Sandy.

"We might rush out and fill 'em full of lead," suggested Tommy.

"Not for me!" the other answered. "They'd get in one good crack at us before we could pull the trigger, and then it would be 'Good-night!'"

"How long do you think they'll stay here?" asked Tommy.

"The bear has the reputation of being a stayer," replied the other.

"Well, in time," Tommy said, "we'll have to make a break. We've got about enough provisions for breakfast, and after that, we'll be on the verge of starvation as long as we remain here. So far as I can see, we may as well make a break right now."

"I'm game for it," replied Sandy. "We'll dazzle their eyes with our searchlights, and fire a whole clip of bullets without stopping. Perhaps that'll bring them down or cause them to run away."

"All right!" Tommy agreed. "We'll round the corner together with our searchlights held in front and begin shooting."

"And don't make any mistake about shooting straight!" advised Sandy. "I don't want Will and George to know that we ever got into a mess like this. You know what they said about our coming away tonight, anyhow!"

"Sure, I know!" admitted Tommy. "And I'd rather have one of the bears bite off an arm than to have them know we got into a scrape we couldn't get out of without their help."

"Well, here goes, then!" cried Sandy.

Without waiting for his chum he sprang around the corner of the wall, his electric advanced, his automatic ready for instant use. As he turned the corner one foot caught on a loose rock and he half fell to the ground. As he did so, Tommy saw a hairy paw shoot out with vicious force and brush and scrape across the boy's shoulder.

Tommy heard the boy's coat ripping and tearing under the clutch of the great claws, and

heard his chum utter a piercing scream as the wicked claws touched the flesh.

It seemed to Tommy that the figure of his chum, now lying prostrate on the floor of the cavern with the head extending outward, was being drawn away from him by the claw which still clung to the shoulder.

He raised his automatic to fire and pushed his searchlight forward. The bear's eyes closed for an instant under the strong finger of light, and the bullet caught him exactly in the center of the forehead.

He dropped with a savage growl, scrambled to his feet again and dashed toward Tommy, who fired shot after shot at the advancing animal, but apparently without avail. In a moment all three bears, doubtless excited by the smell of blood, sprang before the entrance to the little cave where Tommy stood. For the moment the animals paid no attention to Sandy, still lying prostrate on the floor, blood oozing from the wounded shoulder. Tommy fired shot after shot as the bears came on.

For the first time in his life Tommy realized that the next moment might be his last. He saw Sandy lying bleeding on the floor. He saw three savage, pain-maddened animals rushing upon him and worked the trigger of his automatic until the clip was spent. Then he hurled the useless weapon at the nearest animal and seizing Sandy by the feet, dragged him farther into the cavern.

"I guess it's all off now," he mused as the bears stood hesitating and apparently ready for

a spring. "I wish we'd left a note for Will."

He heard the clatter of sharp claws on the rocky floor, saw the pig-like eyes of the animals shining red under the light, heard their spasmodic breathing, and was about to make a desperate rush forward when the outer cavern was flooded with a racing light which grew and grew as Tommy looked. Then he heard the sound of feet.

Next came a volley of shots, followed by the shouts of men and the call of a voice that he knew.

"Tommy!" the voice cried.

The boy did not answer instantly, for his eyes were fixed upon the squirming figures of the bears. They had fallen under the shots and were weaving about the floor, snarling and snapping at each other and at themselves in their blind rage.

Several more shots came, and then the animals lay still.

"Tommy!" came the voice again.

"That's Will!" said Sandy faintly.

"Cripes! Are you alive?" demanded Tommy.

"I wouldn't be talking if I was dead, would I?" asked Sandy, speaking in a very faint tone of voice.

"Sandy!" came the voice again.

"Hello!" called Tommy.

"Come on out!" cried Will.

"We're coming!" Sandy answered.

The next moment the flashlights carried by Will and George swept into the cavern revealing the true condition of affairs.

The two boys sprang to Sandy's side and raised him into a sitting position. Sandy smiled weakly but said nothing.

"Where is he hurt?" asked Will, facing Tommy.

Tommy pointed to the boy's bleeding shoulder.

"One of the bears swatted him," he said.

The cowboys now gathered in front of the little cavern and gazed at the group with excited interest.

"What's coming off here?" the sheriff asked.

"This kid's coat's coming off, for one thing," answered Will, with a slight smile as he drew away at one sleeve. "He's been cut by the bear, and we want to see how badly he's wounded."

Seth stepped forward to assist in the removal of the coat, but the sheriff laid a hand on his arm and drew him back.

"If those two boys have guns," he said, "get them away from them!"

"What's that?" demanded Tommy, gazing at the sheriff indignantly.

"You're all under arrest," thundered the officer, "and I demand that you give up your weapons."

"You'll find my gun out there in the cavern somewhere," Tommy answered. "I threw it at the bears after the last bullet had been fired."

Will put his hand into Sandy's pocket as if feeling for a gun but found none there.

"I dropped it in the cavern," the boy said. "There are no bullets in it, anyway. I shot 'em all at the bear."

Sandy's wound proved to consist only of several scratches in the flesh of the shoulder, but Will

explained to the sheriff that it would be necessary to take him out to where water could be obtained in order that the injury might be properly dressed.

"Come along, then," the sheriff consented. "We've had enough of this underground hole, anyway."

Tommy looked longingly at the three dead bears as he passed out.

"I'm coming back here to get those rugs," he whispered to Will.

"And I'm coming back here and get some bear steak," George contributed.

"What are you boys talking about?" demanded the sheriff.

"Aw, what's eating you?" demanded Tommy, who did not at all understand the situation. "You want to keep your clam closed."

The sheriff turned back and eyed the boy with anger and amazement depicted on his rather heavy features.

"You're one of these Boy Scouts, I presume?" he snarled.

"Yes, sir," answered Tommy. "Proud of it!"

"Then perhaps you can tell me where those train robbers are hiding."

"I would if I could!" replied the boy.

"What are you kids out at this time of night for, anyway?" was the next question. "You ought to be in bed."

"We came out to gather a couple of bear rugs for a Boy Scout clubroom in Chicago," answered Tommy, with a slight grin in Will's direction.

"And what did those boys come out for?"

the sheriff asked, pointing at Will and George and the boy in whose interest they had left camp.

Tommy had no means of knowing what stories the boys might have told regarding their presence in the mountains, and so he decided to dodge the question. This seemed the only safe way.

"Ask them!" he said after a short silence.

By this time the whole party was out in the gulch, standing full in the moonlight. The men conferred together for some moments, and then the sheriff turned to the other members of the party.

"Get your ropes, boys," he said. "We haven't got time to fool with these boys any longer."

"I protest against this action," shouted Seth. "You, Pete, are sheriff of this county, and it is your duty to enforce the laws. If you permit this lynching to take place in your presence, you'll be guilty of the crime of murder, and I warn you that you'll be prosecuted."

Tommy and Sandy looked at their chums questioningly. They did not at all understand what was going on. Will and George were binding up the wound with bandages which they had long carried for use on just such an occasion as this.

"I think I know my duty," answered the sheriff. "Wyoming officers are being made the laughing-stock of the whole world because of the frequency of these train robberies. In nearly every instance, lately, the outlaws have escaped, principally because of assistance given them by such people as we have here under arrest.

The men removed ropes from under their coat and began to unwind them. Seth drew his revolver and waited.

Chapter XI

A WYOMING HOLD-UP

The four men stepped forward toward the boys with the ropes in their hands. The boys stood facing the crowd with unflinching eyes.

"I warn you!" shouted Seth.

"Wait!" Chester cried, stepping forward. "If you're doing this because my friends won't tell why they are in the mountains of Wyoming, and why they are out in the hills tonight, you may as well hold your hands. I'll give you all the information on the subject you desire."

Will stepped forward and caught the boy by the arm.

"You know what it means to—to some one if you speak," he warned.

"But I'm not going to see you boys murdered before my eyes!"

"No more fairy tales go!" shouted a member of the sheriff's gang. "We have an unpleasant duty to perform here and we're not going to shirk it. As the sheriff says, outlaws are flocking to Wyoming because they are hidden and protected by such people as you."

"But I can satisfy you as to the honesty of these boys," pleaded Chester, "if you'll listen to me for five minutes."

"Nothing doing!" shouted the sheriff

Again the men advanced with the ropes and again Seth lifted his revolver in warning. The situation was a critical one.

During the second of silence which followed, a clatter of stones came into the gulch from the rocky summit above, and all eyes were instantly turned in that direction. As they looked the sheriff and his men dropped their weapons to the ground and threw their hands into the air.

"That's right!" came a hoarse voice from above. "Throw down your weapons and drop your belts at your feet. Now line up there in a row, you baby snatchers! Never mind that funny business, there, you man with the red whiskers. You'll drop in your tracks if you make another move! You are the cowboy sheriff of the county, I understand, but you ought to be training puppies for a dogshow. That's about your size."

In a moment every member of the sheriff's posse, including Seth, was unarmed. As they stood meekly in a row the boys were ordered to take their own weapons from the heap on the ground and walk away over the ridge.

"Can you see who they are?" asked Will, as the boys moved slowly along.

"I can see only the outlines of their heads and the gleaming barrels of their rifles," George answered. "Say," the boy went on, "didn't the cowboys drop their weapons quick when they saw those shining muzzles?"

"They knew the other fellows had the drop on them, and I don't blame them," Tommy cut in.

"Do you really think they are the train rob-

bers?" asked Sandy, who was being assisted up the slope by Will and George.

"They're the train robbers, all right!" insisted Tommy. "I can't see their faces any more than you can, but I remember that voice! You remember the night he was at our camp, and we were getting something to eat? Well, I heard quite a lot of his conversation that night. Some of it I liked and some of it I didn't, but I'm sure the man whose conversation I heard that night is the same man who ordered the cowboy officers to throw down their weapons."

"But why should they do a thing like that?" demanded Will.

"I don't know," replied George, "unless it is because train robbers have a continual and perpetual grouch against officers of any kind."

"That must be the reason," Will admitted.

"Well, I'm glad they got us away!" said Tommy, as the five boys reached the summit and looked down into the little valley, "but they sure put us in bad with the cowboys from this time on. The cowboys, apparently with good cause, were accusing us of standing in with the train robbers, and now the train robbers have proven the point by butting in for our protection."

"It's too bad," Will answered, "but I don't see how it can be helped. It is particularly unfortunate at this time, because with the cowboys opposing us we won't dare search the mountains for Chester's father."

"We'll find a way!" insisted Tommy. 'We'll be sure to find a way."

When the boys turned down the slope which

led to their camp, not very far away, daylight was growing in the sky. They could see the figures of the men who had rescued them creeping away to the south.

Shouts and exclamations of rage were coming over the ridge, and the boys understood very well that in a short time the cowboys would be at their camp, with stronger motive than ever for their destruction.

"We've got our guns," Will said as they walked along, "and we've got to fight. That's all there is to it."

When the boys came to the side of the dying campfire they found two men who seemed to be entire strangers sitting calmly in one of the tents, dividing the contents of a great tin of roast beef, and also sharing a huge loaf of bread. The light was still dim in the tent, and so Will turned his electric on the rather domestic scene.

"What are you men doing in there?" he demanded.

"Eating!" was the calm reply.

"I didn't know but you were getting a haircut," grinned Tommy.

"Where'd you come from?" asked George, as the boys all gathered in front of the flap.

"Look here, kids," one of the men said easily, "we've been traveling two days and two nights, and we're hungry and sleepy. Just let us fill up on this chuck and we'll tell you all about it."

"We really ought to go to sleep!" the other intruder suggested. "But, as you seem anxious to know why we're consuming your provisions, I'll relieve your minds of anxiety by saying that

we met John Johnson half way to Green River and he sent us in to tell you that he would arrange for reinforcements for you as soon as he reached Green River. He said he mentioned the fact to you when he was here, but you didn't seem to like it, and so he said nothing more about it to you."

"He sent you in here just to tell us that?" demanded Will.

"Aw, tell him the truth," laughed the other.

"Well, then, I'll tell him the truth," replied the intruder, his mouth full of bread and meat. "We met Johnson while he was on his way out, and he told us to look in on you boys as we passed and see if you were all right. He seemed to have a notion in his head that you'd be apt to get into trouble of some kind."

"Glad you came in," Will said, extending his hand, "I don't know how Mr. Johnson came to think of it, but your coming here just now is something in the nature of a miracle."

"Glad to be of any service!"

Then without explaining the purpose of their night mission into the mountains, the boys explained the situation to the two strangers, dwelling particularly on the fact that the sheriff's cowboys now had good cause for believing that the lads really were associating with the train robbers.

"I think the train robbers held the officers up more because they've got a grouch against all policemen than for any other reason," Will said. "I don't see why they should cut in in order to save our lives. The sheriff will get good and even with them for that!"

"Just a grouch against all the officers in the

world!" laughed one of the strangers. "All brigands feel that way."

"But you can see where it leaves us!" exclaimed George. "We can't have any fun in the mountains with those fellows chasing us all the time, and one of our friends is wandering around in the mountains nutty, with a broken head, and we can't even go out and find him if this hostile attitude of the cowboys continues."

"You think they'll follow you down to camp, do you?" asked one of the men. "Of course the outlaws wouldn't hold them very long."

"Yes, I think they'll follow us down to camp and they won't lose any time getting here, either," Will answered.

"Did you ever seen anything like it?" asked Tommy as, accompanied by George, he started toward the provision box.

"Like what?" demanded the other.

"Why, this lone mountain valley becoming the center of population of the United States!" exclaimed Tommy. "When we came in here, there wasn't a soul in sight in the valley. And then the robbers came, and the detectives came, and the cowboys came, and Johnson came, then we got next to Chester, and now these two strangers come butting in. If this isn't the center of population, I'd like to know where it is."

"It's a good thing we've got those old burros picketed out on the grass," George observed. "In about two days more, we'll have to set sail for Green River and load up with provisions. We've been running a public eating house ever

since we struck Wyoming. I wonder how long these fellows are going to stay. If they remain more than one day, I'm going to charge 'em for board or send them out fishing."

"When you want any fish," Tommy exclaimed, "you needn't send any strange guys out to get 'em. I'll bring in all the fish you want!"

George chuckled, and Tommy threw an empty can at his head.

"When you go out fishing," George said in a moment, "just let us know, and we'll send a guard out with you."

"Oh, just because I had a little trouble up on Lake Superior and down in Florida, you think I can't catch fish!" complained Tommy. "You just wait until we get this rumpus with the cowboy officers settled and I'll show you whether I can catch fish or not."

"I wish we had some of that bear steak!" George suggested. "We're eating the ham and eggs all up, and we're right in the middle of a game country at that.

"Look here," Tommy suggested, "you go right on cooking ham and warming up those shoestring potatoes, and I'll sneak over the ridge and bring back about fifty pounds of bear." Besides, he went on, "I want to get those hides before the wolverines get them, or any one sneaks them off."

Just as Tommy disappeared up the slope the cowboy officers were seen rushing toward the camp, their weapons ready for use.

"I guess they think the train robbers are here," commented Will.

Chapter XII

AN INTERRUPTED WIG-WAG

The boys gathered in a little group not far from the fire and awaited, with what excitement and anxiety may well be imagined, the arrival of the officers. Their automatics were in their hands. A short distance from the camp the cowboys paused as if for a consultation, although the show of weapons made by the boys may have had something to do with their quick stop.

As the boys stood ready to defend themselves if attacked, they noticed that the two strangers who had recently arrived at the camp were creeping farther into the tent, at the flap of which they had been sitting. The lads saw weapons in their hands, but saw no evidence that the fellows intended using them. Sandy gave Will a nudge on the shoulder.

"Do you think those fellows are all right?" he asked. "Looks funny to see them crawling out of sight as soon as danger shows!"

"It does look strange," Will admitted, "but look here," he added, pointing to the boy's bandaged shoulder, "you ought to be in one of the tents yourself. You're not fit to be out here if any fighting takes place."

"Huh, I guess this bum shoulder won't prevent me from shooting straight!" declared Sandy. "Say," he continued, "I've a great mind to go in

where those fellows are and ask what they're hiding away for."

"I just believe," George cut in, "that those fellows lied when they said Johnson asked them to come here. You remember how they told two stories, don't you? One that they had been told to tell us that reinforcements would be sent in, and the other that they had been asked to stop and see us on their way into the mountains."

"We're certainly in a nice box if we've got enemies in our own camp," Will grumbled. "In that case, as soon as the shooting begins we'll be between two fires. By the way," he went on, "where's Tommy?"

"Gone after bear meat for breakfast," answered George.

"He's always dodging away without any one knowing what's in his mind!"? declared Will, rather crossly. "I guess he's got some idea above bear steak for breakfast, right now. Anyhow," the boy added, "if Tommy is well armed these cowboy fly-cops will also be between two fires when the battle opens. That will help some."

"Perhaps there won't be any battle," suggested George. "Those fellows don't seem to be in any hurry about starting in, anyway."

"Oh, they'll never swallow the bluff they got from the train robbers," Will insisted. "As soon as the story is told outside they'll be roasted by the whole state. Just think of it!" the boy went on. "They come in here to capture two train robbers and get held up the first thing. If there's a live editor in the state he'll print

a faked-up picture of the six men with their hands up in the air and their guns lying at their feet."

"Perhaps they saw the two strangers come in," suggested Sandy. "In that case they may be doing a little guessing as to whether the newcomers won't help us in case of trouble."

"But these two men were here before we returned," suggested George.

"Well, they may have seen them sitting in the flap of the tent eating our good pork and beans and roast beef," Will went on.

"If they knew that the two strangers were hiding in the back corner of one of the tents," George commented, "I don't think they'd hesitate much longer. These two visitors may be all right, but they don't look it!"

"Why don't you go and ask them if they wouldn't like to have us dig a hole to put them in"? demanded Sandy.

"While the boys were puzzling over the situation, Seth, the deputy who had defended the Boy Scouts when they stood in grave danger of being lynched, separated himself from the group of officers and advanced toward the camp. There was a smile on the deputy's face as he approahced but the other members of the party were scowling heavily.

The boys dropped the muzzles of their automatics as Seth came up to the fire. The deputy stood for a moment glancing keenly around at the tents, the burros, and the cooking utensils before speaking.

"Glad to see you so comfortably situated, boys," he said, "and I'm glad, also," he went on,

pointing to the pennants which showed at the tops of the tents, "to see that you're not ashamed to show your colors."

"We're proud of being Boy Scouts!" Will declared.

"And we're proud of the Beaver Patrol!" George cut in.

"That's right, boys!" Seth said. "Stick to Boy Scout laws and teachings and you can't go very far wrong."

"What are those fellows going to do now?" asked Will, nodding toward the cowboy officers, who had now thrown themselves down upon the long grass of the valley. "They didn't follow us here just for exercise."

"If those train robbers really are friends of yours," Seth replied, "they have done you, perhaps unintentionally, a great deal of harm. It is an old saying, you know," the deputy went on, "that one fool friend can work a man more mischief than a dozen open enemies."

"I suppose you people think now," Will said, "that we really do train with that bunch of robbers."

"I don't!" declared Seth. "I know you to be honest Boy Scouts, and no counterfeits, and I don't believe such lads mix up with train robbers."

"We don't at all events," Will answered.

"Look here," George interrupted, "the train robbers saw a chance to rub it into the officers and they did it. That's all there is to that! They would have protected the detectives who were searching the mountains, or even a band of burglars, just the same as they did us. You know

very well that such fellows have a perpetual grouch against officers of the law. The only wonder is they didn't shoot when they had the cowboys unarmed.

"Even train robbers are averse to committing murder," replied Seth.

"Well, what are they going to do about it?" Will insisted.

"They want you to come out to Lander with me and stand trial."

"And if we refuse?"

"But you won't do that!"

"You are mistaken there," replied Will. "If they want us, they've got to come and get us."

"That isn't good judgment," declared Seth.

While the two discussed the situation, the others listening intently, the two visitors came slowly out of the tent and approached the spot where Seth and Will were standing. Seth regarded the two men quizzically for a moment and then extended both hands in greeting.

"Glad to see you, Gilmore!" he said. "How long have you been here?"

"Only a short time," was the reply. "At the request of a personal friend, an officer from Chicago, we dropped in for breakfast and also to see if the boys needed any assistance."

"Boys," Seth said, turning to the astonished group of youngsters, "this is Sheriff Gilmore of Sweetwater county, and this, "pointing to the other, "is Doyle, one of his deputies. They are both good fellows."

"Did you say you knew John Johnson well?" asked Will, after greetings had been exchanged.

"Was it the truth you said about his asking you to call and help us out if we needed assistance?"

"True as Gospel!" answered Gilmore. "I knew John Johnson when he was on a ranch over here in the Sweetwater country. I'm taking a little excursion into Pete's country in search of the train robbers. I met Johnson going out, and he asked me to call on his friends, the boys."

"So you can vouch for these lads, can you?" asked Seth, a smile of satisfaction coming to his face.

"I certainly can!" was the reply. "Johnson told me all about them, so I know what they're here for, and all about their movements."

Before speaking, Seth took off his hat and began waving it in the direction of the cowboy officers. Sheriff Pete and his deputies rose to their feet and walked toward the camp. Before reaching the fire, they recognized Sheriff Gilmore and came forward with extended hands. The situation was soon explained.

"Now see here, kiddo," Sheriff Pete said, as he drew Will to one side, "we don't know what you're in here for, but we know now that you're all right. We'll stand by you to the bottom of the deck if you'll just forget all about that little hold-up over in the other valley."

"That was funny, wasn't it?" Will said with a grin.

"I can't see anything funny in it!" said the Sheriff.

"Those train robbers looked pretty good to us just then," Will commented. "They came just in time!"

"You wouldn't have been harmed," said the sheriff, with a smile. "I was only putting in a little third degree work."

"All right," Will said, "you help us if it comes handy for you to do so, and we won't say a word about the hold-up."

The two sheriffs and their deputies discussed the situation thoroughly, and finally decided that the two train robbers were making for the Bad Lands in Big Horn county.

"If Tommy'd only come back now with that bear steak," Will suggested, "I could get all you boys a dinner that would put an inch of fat on your ribs! Seems to me it's pretty near time for him to be back."

"Suppose I go and hurry him up?" asked George.

"Go to it!" Will replied, "and I'll get out a lot of spuds and make a gallon of coffee, and we'll have a Sunday School picnic right here in the long grass! You've got to feed before you go away!"

"Everything looks mighty friendly here just now," Sandy answered, "but look up on top of the ridge, and see if you can tell what George is trying to say to us. That's Boy Scout wig-wag, all right!"

"Yes," replied Will, springing to his feet excitedly. "That's the Myer code, sure as you live, and he's got a big white pine bough he's using as a flag. Can you see what he is saying?"

"Sure!" replied Sandy. "He says he wants—now what do you think of that? He's stopped!"

As they looked the boy dropped to the ground!

Chapter XIII

TOMMY GOES AFTER BEAR STEAK

Tommy started up the slope whistling gaily. At the summit he turned to look back at the camp. The cowboys were at that time standing some distance away and Seth was advancing toward the fire.

"That Seth is a good Indian!" declared the boy. "He'll fix things up all right, so there's no need of my going back. Gee!" he went on as he looked up and down the pleasant valley, warm and sweet under the morning sun. "It's a pretty good thing to be a Boy Scout! Here we find a man in the mountains of Wyoming ready to fight for us just because we are Boy Scouts. I should think every boy in the world would want to join!"

The lad stood for a moment watching the figures at the distant camp, and then hastened into the valley below. When he struck the rock-strewn gulch which lay to the south of the wider opening in the hills he paused and looked cautiously about.

"There may be plenty more bears here!" he mused.

But no bears or hostile animals of any kind were in sight, so the boy passed along to the cavern which George and Will had visited on the previous night—the cavern where the escaped

convict and his son had made their home. Tommy glanced curiously into the opening in the rocky wall as he halted in front of it.

On the previous night he had passed this cavern in company with Sandy without observing it. At this time he was not certain that it was not the cave where he had met the bears, so he stepped inside after a moment's thought and advanced toward the rear wall.

A semi-twilight lay over the interior, and the boy brought out his searchlight. By its rays he saw a break in the rock of the north wall and stepped closer. The place was merely an alcove eight or ten feet in size, doubtless carved out by the action of water.

In the alcove the boy saw the embers of a fire. Then he turned about and inspected the outer cave more carefully. He saw the rude furniture which his chums had observed the night before, and the pitifully small supply of cooking utensils. Lying on the table was a generous supply of fresh meat, evidently taken from the carcass of one of the bears.

Tommy had heard little said concerning the cave which had been occupied by Wagner and his son, but quite enough to understand that he had stumbled upon the place.

What puzzled him now was the presence of the bear meat. He knew very well that neither Wagner nor his son had occupied the place since the disappearance of the father. He understood, too, that if there had been provisions in the cave at the time of the visit of his chums, they would have referred to the fact. Besides all this, the

bear which had probably supplied the meat had been killed only a few hours before.

"I guess some one's moved in!" the boy mused.

He went into the alcove and examined the embers of the fire. It had been built of dry pine and spruce boughs and had evidently burned brightly an hour before.

"Now I wonder," the boy puzzled, "whether Wagner isn't hiding some where in the cave. It doesn't seem to me that any one else would take possession of the blooming old flat."

Resolved to return to the cavern later, the lad hastened outside and moved toward the south. He was not exactly certain of the location of the cavern where the fight with the bears had taken place, but he had no doubt that he could find it by peering into every opening he came to.

He had proceeded but a short distance when the face of Katz peered out at him from one of the minor caves. Cullen, the fellow's associate, stood not far away with his cruel mouth stretched into a sardonic grin.

"Where're you going, boy?" Katz asked.

Tommy hestiated a moment and a twinkle of humor came into his eyes as he answered the gruff question of the detective.

"I'm looking after the train robbers you chased up last night."

The two men scowled angrily and drew nearer to the lad.

"I don't believe you told the truth about that train robber!" Katz said. "I was right on the ground and I saw no one."

"You beat him to it!" laughed Tommy. "You went one way and he went the other! You're both good runners, I guess, for you never came within a mile of each other," he added.

"None of your impudence, now!" snarled Katz.

"I think we ought to take this boy in out of the wet," suggested Cullen. "He's too fresh, anyway."

"You'd better confine your attentions to the train robbers, or the man you came in here to find," suggested Tommy.

"I don't believe there are any train robbers here!" declared Katz.

"Perhaps not," answered Tommy, "but about half the officers of Fremont and Sweetwater counties are loafing around these hills! Besides," he added, "I got a look at the train robbers last night."

The two detectives glanced at each other apprehensively.

"Was there a train robber at your camp last night?" asked Katz.

"Sure there was!"

"Is your camp headquarters for outlaws?"

"Not that I know of," replied Tommy, angrily.

"Don't you know that the boy who stole my property at your camp is connected with an escaped convict?"

"I don't know anything about the boy," declared Tommy, not telling the truth exactly. "He looks all right to me!"

"Do you know what I think?" Cullen demanded. "I think you boys came in here to set up a base of supplies for outlaws!"

"Aw, you don't know what you're talking about!" exclaimed Tommy.

"If you're not mixed up with this escaped convict," Katz demanded, "what are you doing here?"

"Early this morning," Cullen went on, "we found the cave where Wagner and his son had been living. That's it back there. The one you entered and looked over so carefully. Did you expect to find Wagner there?"

"Did you build a fire in there?" asked Tommy.

The detectives shook their heads.

"Did you take a big piece of bear meat in there?"

"We certainly did not!"

Here was another puzzler for Tommy. Who had built the fire in the cavern? Who had taken the bear meat there? The cowboys were not in that vicinity at the time the fire must have been built. The detectives declared that they had not built the fire, or carried in the meat.

"Did you find a fire burning in the cavern?" asked Katz.

Tommy nodded.

"And fresh meat there, too?"

Another nod from the boy.

"What do you make of it, Cullen?" asked Katz, turning to his companion.

Cullen shook his head, and a thought which brought a smile to his freckled face crept into Tommy's mischievous cranium.

"I'll tell you what I think," he said. "We were in this gulch last night, and saw the train robbers. They were on the summit, not far from

the Wagner flat, as we ought to call it. If anybody has been living in that cave this morning, it's the train robbers. Say," he went on, with the idea of giving the detectives a good scare, "those train robbers are the fiercest fellows I ever saw. We saw 'em hold up six armed cowboys last night!"

The two detectives looked at each other apprehensively.

"If they should see you standing here," Tommy went on, "and were wise to the fact that you are Chicago detectives, they'd pump in the lead until your heads looked like a pound of Swiss cheese."

"You seem to know quite a lot about those train robbers, lad!"

"He knows too much," Cullen declared. "We'll just take him along with us and hold him for a few hours!"

"If you do, you'll get in trouble!" declared Tommy.

"No threats, now!" cried Katz.

"I'm not making any threats," declared Tommy who really was rather anxious to have the detectives take him away to their camp. "I think you're a couple of cheap skates, anyway, and I don't believe you're Chicago detectives. I live in Chicago myself, and I never saw bums like you on the force of plain clothes men."

The taunting words did exactly what Tommy had expected them to do. Katz seized him viciously by the arm and started away down the valley. The boy was perfectly willing to accompany the detective, for he believed that by doing so he might find out what steps they were taking

for the capture of the escaped convict, but he pretended to feel great indignation as he was hurried along over the rough ground.

As the three moved away George swung up the slope on the other side and came into view on the summit. The boy had cut a white pine climbing staff from which the small boughs had not been trimmed away, and Tommy saw that he was using this as a wig-wag flag. It was plain to the boy that George thoroughly understood the situation below.

The detectives growled out several vicious oaths as they saw the boy swinging his staff from the summit. They whispered together for a moment, and then Katz, leaving Tommy threatened by Cullen's revolver, moved toward the summit and the signaling boy.

When, in a moment, George looked down the slope to the east, he saw the detective creeping stealthily toward him. The officer was some distance away, yet the boy knew that he was in danger from the gun in his hand. He gave one last swing and dropped his staff.

"Come down here!" shouted the detective. "I want to see you!"

"Come up here, then!" answered George. "What are you doing to my chum? You're always butting in on us boys!"

"If you don't come down instantly," shouted the angry detective, "I'll fill your hide full of lead! I've got you covered!"

Seeing by the malicious look on the face of the detective that he was really in earnest, George dropped quickly to the ground.

Chapter XIV

A PAIR OF PRISONERS

Tommy saw his chum drop and, supposing that he had been injured in some way, started racing up the slope. Directly he found himself hampered by Cullen, who was clinging to the tail of his khaki coat.

As the boy drew up George rose from the ground and moved down the slope facing the east. Tommy saw that he was acting under instructions from Katz, who held a revolver in his hand.

In five minutes the boys, unarmed now, were walking along by the side of the detectives. A wink from George convinced Tommy that his chum had at least succeeded in attracting the attention of the people at the camp below. It might be that help would come before the detectives could lead them to a hiding place in the hills.

What the boys appeared to need just at that time was delay, so they asked all sorts of questions as they walked along, hoping that their captors would pause to answer them. However, the fellows plugged steadily along toward the opposite side of the ridge, and finally drew up on a shelf of rock from which the caverns to the west could be plainly seen. Here the officials sat down to watch and wait.

Directly a group of men came dashing over the

summit and hastened down into the valley. The boys were certain that they recognized Will in the company. It was certain that Sheriff Pete was there, and the boys were positive that the two men who had been found in the camp on their return from the midnight expedition were also there.

The men separated at the foot of the slope and scattered up and down the gulch. It was clear that George's wig-wag signals had been seen, and that the men were in search of the two boys.

"Those signals of yours must be effective," snarled Katz as the members of the party across the gorge began exploring the caverns.

"You're right, they are!" answered George. "That's the Boy Scout wig-wag! You have to learn those things when you join the Boy Scouts!"

"What did you say?"

"I explained that we had been captured by the train robbers!" replied George, telling the untruth with a great deal of satisfaction as he saw the effect produced on the detectives.

"What'd you do that for?" demanded Cullen. "Because we want the cowboy officers to get hold of you fellows, and beat you up!" answered George. "They'll do it, too, if they lay hands on you! Those fellows are our friends!"

"Where's that boy who stole my property?" demanded Katz.

"He was down in the camp when I left," replied George.

"Do you think he's with that crowd on the other side of the gulch now? Or would he stay at the camp?"

"He probably would come out in answer to George's signal," Tommy cut in.

The detectives whispered together for some moments. Although the boys could not hear a word they were saying, they understood very well what all the whispering was about. They were discussing the possibility of capturing Chester and forcing him to lead them to his father's hiding place. They did not, of course, know that the father was wandering over the mountains in a demented condition.

After a time the party passed on down the valley much to the disgust of the two captive lads, and disappeared from sight. Then the detectives left the angle of the ledge which had concealed them and motioned the boys down the slope. The lads obeyed wonderingly.

Arrived at the bottom of the gulch once more, the detectives halted for another long consultation. Katz seemed to be in favor of following the party which had gone down the valley in the hope of getting hold of Chester, while Cullen was of the opinion that they might be able to capture the escaped convict himself by lingering around the cavern where the fire had been so mysteriously kindled.

While the two discussed, not without some show of anger, the situation, the two boys kept their eyes fixed on the opposite cavern. George knew positively that it was the one which had been occupied by the escaped convict and his son, and he believed that in time the father would return to it. It seemed to him that Cullen was clinging to an opinion which might cause himself and friends serious trouble.

"Gee!" he whispered to Tommy, "I wish we could get these flatties to follow the cowboys! I'm afraid they'll catch Wagner if they hang around that cave over there!"

"I'm afraid they will!" replied Tommy. "There's some one been there this morning, and it wasn't the cowboys or the detectives, either. It was either Wagner or the train robbers."

"Just as sure as you're a foot high," exclaimed George, "there's some one moving about in the entrance to that cavern now! I can see something moving, but I can't see any features."

"Well, don't look that way too steadily," Tommy cried. "If Wagner is over there we don't want to put these detectives wise to the fact. He's the man they're in here after, you remember!"

"Well, there's some one there, all right!" exclaimed George. "While you were talking, I saw a chalk-white face appear for a second at the entrance. I'll bet he's been hiding there ever since last night."

"He was with the train robbers last night," suggested Tommy. "At least we think he was, for there are only two robbers and we saw three men."

"He may be with the train robbers, now for all we know," George put in.

"Yes, they may be hiding over there," Tommy admitted. "If I thought they were, I'd steer these bum detectives up against them!"

"We'd better not take any chances!" advised George. "If Wagner is over there, he may be alone. In that case, these cheap flatties would

geezle him and make for the Union Pacific railroad without stopping to say good-by to the hills. And once they get to the railroad, it's all off with the young man in Chicago who is soon to be tried for murder."

While the boys discussed the situation, Katz caught sight of the moving figure in the entrance to the cavern. The boys saw him pointing in that direction and about abandoned hope.

"There's some one over there," the boys heard Katz saying, "and we may as well go and see who it is. Have you got a pair of hand-cuffs with you?" he added, turning to his companion.

"Of course I have!" was the reply.

"Then use them on these two boys!" ordered Katz. "Tie them together so they won't be apt to go chasing off if we get into action."

Cullen did as requested, and the boys, unable to make resistance at that time, resolved that both officers should pay well for the indignity in the future. When the detectives started forward, they walked as slowly as possible, one of them frequently falling down, in order to give the person in the cavern, whoever he might be, plenty of time to observe the approach of the detectives.

"Gee!" exclaimed Tommy. "These fellows blunder along like a load of hay. If the man over there has any sense, he'll be a mile off before they get to the entrance! I hope the train robbers are there!"

"Well, I hope Wagner isn't there," George said.

There were no signs of light as the two detectives scrambled up the little slope which lay be-

tween the bottom of the gulch and the entrance to the cavern. The faint smell of burning wood reached their nostrils, but no one was in sight. They stepped inside boldly.

Following along behind, more as a matter of curiosity than because they felt obliged to do so, the boys saw the detectives standing in the twilight of the place looking about. Then they saw them drop their arms to their sides, heard the clatter of revolvers upon the rocky floor and realized that something unexpected was taking place inside.

Directly the detectives came out to the entrance and sat down on the hard floor, their backs against the south wall. The boys looked them over with pleased eyes, and Tommy went so far as to wrinkle his freckled nose at Katz, who frowned savagely but said nothing.

"Look here, you fellows," Katz finally blurted out. "I want you to understand that you're getting yourselves into trouble."

"Is that so?" came a hoarse and scornful voice from the darkness.

"I'm Detective Katz, of the Chicago force," continued the officer, "and I command you, in the name of the law, to return our weapons and let us depart in peace!"

"And I guess you don't know who we are!" came the voice from inside. "We're Red Mike of the Gulch and Daring Dan of the Devil's Dip, and we're out for blood! When we're at home in the Bad Lands, we feed on rattlesnakes!"

"Say," Tommy whispered to George, "that ain't so bad, is it? Those fellows know they've

got the detectives buffaloed, and they're piling it on. I'll bet if we sat a little nearer, we could hear the detectives' teeth rattle!"

"The robbers certainly have a sense of humor," grinned George.

In a moment two muscular, bearded figures came out of the cavern and stood facing the two detectives. The boys at once recognized the men as the ones who had ridden so fiercely by their campfire on the night of their arrival. Tommy was certain that one of the men was the person who had been waiting for supper at the camp when informed of the presence of the detectives.

"Do you belong with this bunch?" one of them asked.

The boys held up their handcuffed wrists.

"Who's got the key?" demanded the outlaw.

Cullen held out a ring of keys and the robber promptly used one of them on the handcuff. When the manacles dropped from the boys' wrists, he threw the ring of keys into the gulch and tossed the handcuffs in the same direction.

"I've claimed all along that you boys belonged with these train robbers," Katz gritted as the handcuffs rattled down the slope.

"And now we know it!" Cullen cut in.

The two boys leaned against the north wall of the cavern and shook their sides with laughter. The fright of the two detectives was so absolute that it was pitiful.

"You certainly are a bum pair of detectives!" Tommy said.

Chapter XV

AN UNDERGROUND CHANNEL

Following along behind the two sheriffs and their deputies, Will and Chester finally came to the cavern which by mutual consent the boys now called the Cave of the Three Bears.

"Tommy was headed for this place!" exclaimed Will. "It's a mystery to me where George disappeared to so suddenly. Of course, we didn't see enough of his wig-wag to know what he intended to say, but we understand there's something amiss."

"There are plenty of caverns here in which one may hide," Chester answered. "There is one just north of this which has several good-sized rooms. Father and I thought of moving to that one."

They passed into the Cave of the Three Bears and found that one hide had been partly removed, and that a huge piece of meat had been taken away.

"I guess Tommy's been here all right!" Will suggested.

Chester stooped down and examined the carcass carefully.

"No," he said. "Tommy wanted the three skins for rugs. He never cut the hide like that to get at the meat."

"No, he wouldn't do that," Will admitted.

"Father may have been here," suggested Chester.

"We should have stopped at the cave where you two formerly lived," said Will. "For all we know, your father may be hiding there now."

"I know it," replied Chester, "but we came on so fast and in such a state of excitement that we didn't think of doing so."

"Well, we mustn't let the others get too far ahead of us," Will suggested. "They must be quite a ways off now!"

"Don't you think we can do a better job with them out of the way?" asked Chester. "They go roaring along like a herd of elephants."

"I presume we can," replied Will. "Anyway, we can make an investigation of our own and then go back to camp. Sandy is alone there with his wounded shoulder, and almost anything is likely to happen."

"We'll go into the cave I spoke about a moment ago," Chester said, "and examine it thoroughly with the searchlights."

"What's the idea of that?" asked Will.

"Well," Tommy and George are in some one of these caves. They may be hiding from us or they may have been captured by the train robbers. If they are hidden away, they're quite likely to be in the large cavern I spoke of. It won't do any harm to look through it."

"Why, that must be the cave where we saw the three men last night!" Will exclaimed. "I have an idea that the three men we saw were the two train robbers and your father."

"That was my idea at the time," the boy re

plied, "but now I can't quite make up my mind that father would tie up with such a bunch."

"Bless your innocent soul," grinned Will. "Your father couldn't help associating with them if they insisted upon it! I can see no reason why they should want to molest him, but one can never account for the mental processes of train robbers."

"I believe this is the same place!" Chester cried as they stepped inside. "You know father often talked about moving to this cave, and I've got an idea that he knows more about the locality than I do."

"In what way?" asked Will.

"Well, I think he found some secret passage here. I believe he knows how to enter and leave this cavern without being seen. This whole ridge, you know, is honeycombed with caverns and tunnels. I have been told," the boy continued, "that the gorge and the valley to the east formed the basin for a great lake, hundreds of years ago, and that the water seeped through the limestone rock until there wasn't much left of it in some places. There are certainly plenty of caves here!'

"I should say so!" replied Will turning on his searchlight.

"Look here," Chester went on, "that would be a reason for the train robbers hanging to father, if they found him, wouldn't it?'

"I don't understand," replied Will.

"Why, if father knows a lot of passages and hiding places and empty river channels, in this section, he's just the man the train robbers would want to tie to.''

"I understand now," Will replied. "And you remember, too," he continued, "how mysteriously the three men disappeared last night? Why, they got out of sight as quickly as if they had been painted on a slate and rubbed out."

"That's a fact!" replied Chester.

"There's one thing about it," Will argued, "the train robbers won't dare to go on into the bad lands, for they have no supplies, and their horses must be about used up. By remaining here, they may be able to steal supplies and possibly get out to Lander and buy some."

"I guess we've got it doped out all right," Chester answered. "All we've got to do now is to go on and see whether we have or not."

The boys pressed on to the back of the first cavern and turned to the right into one which ran parallel with it. Their lights showed that a fire had been built in the tunnel connecting the two. There were also empty tin cans and cardboard food packages scattered about

"This looks like population," grinned Will.

"Isn't this the spot from which the men disappeared?" asked Chester.

"Unless I am much mistaken," Will returned, "the three men were in front of a fire in this tunnel. Say, but they did get out of sight quick, didn't they? It was like the scene from the Black Crook."

"Then the passage they crawled into can't be far away," Chester volunteered, "at any rate, right here's where we want to make our search!"

"There's no knowing where this wrinkle leads to," Will said as the lights revealed the narrow

channel. "If we get down there, we may never be able to get back."

"Father must have known of this place," Chester said, "and that's why he talked about moving our camp here."

"Well, if he used the passage, we certainly can!" replied Will.

"Are we going down now?" asked Chester.

"I'm game for it."

"Well, then, wait a minute!"

Chester ran to the entrance of the cavern and looked up and down the gorge and valley. When he returned there was a worried look on his face. He pointed to the dry channel and said:

"We may as well be getting down there. There's some one coming."

"Who is it?" asked Will.

"I couldn't distinguish faces," was the reply.

"Wasn't George and Tommy, was it?"

"No, two men. They're coming along fast, so we may as well get under cover. We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way," he smiled as he dropped down on his hands and knees and scrambled backward into what had once been the channel of a mountain stream.

Will followed in a moment and, after trying his best to draw the boulder into place, scrambled on after his chum.

"Did you get the rock fixed?" asked Chester as they came together on a little level place probably thirty feet down.

"Couldn't budge it!" was the reply.

"Well, then, we'll keep on going."

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed Will. "I believe

this thing runs clear through the ridge. And that would make it something like a mile long!"

"Of course it does," Chester answered. "This ditch was cut by water, and the water had to find an outlet somewhere."

"If your father knows all about this underground network of caverns and channels," Will said in a moment, "we'll have a happy old time finding him! He can dodge us here for a month."

"And those officers will have a fine old job getting the train robbers, too," Chester chuckled, "if they're acquainted with this underground system of highways. It strikes me," he went on, "that these train robbers have been here before."

"That may be!" answered Will. "In fact, it occurs to me that your father searched out all these subterranean roads and rooms and showed them to the train robbers."

The boys proceeded downward for some distance and then stopped in a tolerably large chamber to rest and investigate.

"There's no use of our going on until we know whether the fellows you saw are coming in here," Will reasoned.

"I'm going up to the top again," said Chester, "and see what's going on there! The fellows I saw may be coming in."

Will waited for a long half hour for the boy's return, and when at last Chester slid down to him his face showed that he was frightened.

"They've got the combination to this channel all right!" he said.

Chapter XVI

CULLEN LOSES HIS STAR

"So these are the detectives, are they?" asked one of the train robbers, as the two men crouched against the wall of the cavern.

"That's what they say!" answered Tommy.

"What were they doing to you?"

"They had us pinched."

"What for?"

"They said we belonged to your gang."

The bandit laughed hoarsely.

"To our gang?" he said. "The perfectly correct gentleman of the road never has a 'gang'. He believes thoroughly in the old theory that 'he travels fastest who travels alone'."

"So they pinched you for being associates of ours, did they?" asked the other outlaw.

"That's what they said," replied Tommy.

"And that was the truth, too!" roared Katz. "You seem to know all about these boys, and they know all about you. You've been seen at their camp, and one of the boys at the camp stole my property, too!" he went on with another roar of indignation.

"Chester stole his official star!" chuckled Tommy.

"That's a pious notion, too?" laughed the outlaw. "Have you got a star, too?" he asked, stepping up

to Cullen. "If you have, hand it over. I don't think you're fit to wear a police badge!"

Cullen handed his star over with a scowl, and the outlaw passed it to Tommy. The boy put it in his pocket with a grin at the detective.

"Did you fellows have the nerve to come in here after us?" asked the robber.

"We came in after an escaped convict," was the reply.

"Did you get him?"

"Not yet, but we will get him."

"Well, I'd advise you both to go back home before the escaped convict comes up and steals your necktie. You're not large enough to be out alone after dark."

"We're going to take that escaped convict back with us," Katz boasted. "We'll get him if we stay here a year."

"We'll give you two days to get him," grinned one of the outlaws. "We'll turn you loose for two days. If you catch him in that time and get out, very well. If you don't catch him in that time, you'll get out anyhow. You stiffs are attracting altogether too much attention to this part of the country. It's getting so an honest train robber can't get a good night's sleep."

The outlaw pointed to the gulch below and motioned for the fellows to move along. They started but looked back pleadingly.

"Can't we have our guns?" Katz asked.

"And our badges?" pleaded Cullen.

"No," replied the outlaw. "You might injure yourself with the guns, and the badges are no good anywhere outside of Chicago. If you don't

get out right now, we'll handcuff you to a tree and let the bears feed on you. You don't look good to us anyway."

"Look-a-here," Tommy said to the two outlaws as the detectives disappeared down the gulch. "Do you know that every person in the state of Wyoming will be believing that we really belong to your crowd if this thing keeps up? We're much obliged to you for bluffing the cowboys last night, and getting us out of the handcuffs just now, but you're getting us into trouble just the same."

"Any time we get a chance to bluff an officer out of a captive, we're going to do it!" laughed one of the outlaws. "We're not asking you whether you like it or not. We're pleasing ourselves in what we're doing."

"And here's another thing," the other outlaw said, with something like a scowl. "We've got the idea that you wouldn't be doing as much for us as we've been doing for you. The men who came in here to hunt us down make their headquarters at your camp. If you go back to your friends now, you'll tell them where you saw us, and describe everything that's taken place. Therefore, we're not going to let you go back to your camp right away. You're going to be our guests for a time."

"What's the good of that?" demanded Tommy.

"That's our business," replied the outlaw.

"We'll never mention you to our crowd," George added.

"Anyway," the outlaw insisted, "it's safer for us to keep track of you two kids. I'd rather have

a dozen Chicago sleuths after me than three or four husky little Boy Scouts."

"Say," Tommy asked with a grin, "do you remember those plays where a shrinking maiden would be in the center of the stage one minute and be grabbed by the villain the next, and be grabbed back by the hero in the next, and be grabbed back by the villain in the next, and be grabbed back by the hero for the final curtain?"

"I remember something like that," said the outlaw with a laugh.

"That's us!" grinned Tommy. "That's George and me! We're here to be captured by cowboys, and bum detectives, and bearded train robbers, and I don't know what form our imprisonment will take next."

"When we get back to Chicago," George went on, whimsically, "we're going to write up a story of our capture by two bold, bad men who gave their names as Red Mike of the Gulch and Daring Dan of the Devil's Dip or something like that."

"Say," Tommy cut in, "when you called those names out of the darkness you certainly did have those detectives buffaloed!"

"You're a pair of nervy kids, anyway," laughed the outlaw.

"Oh, this is all right," laughed Tommy. "This will be one more experience. We've been chased by smugglers over the Pictured Rocks of Lake Superior, and we've been chased by alligators in the Everglades of Florida, and now we've been geezled by the bold, bad men who held up the Union Pacific pay car."

"How do you know we did?" demanded one of the outlaws.

"That's the dope that's been coming to us right along."

"Well, come on," the other outlaw said rather impatiently. "We've got to get out of sight! We can't expect to remain in the open in broad daylight without being seen by some one."

"Move along, boys," ordered the other.

"Where?" asked Tommy.

"Straight ahead."

"But where are you going to take us?"

"Oh, you'll know all about that soon enough," was the reply. "We've got a place over here where we can keep our friends in seclusion."

"It seems the place keeps you in seclusion," grinned George. "You've been in here about as long as we have, and we've been captured numerous times and you've never been taken at all. But you'll get it up your neck one of these days," he added.

"When we're captured," one of the men said grimly, "it won't be by a lot of tin-horn detectives from Chicago."

They all walked along for some distance, and then Tommy turned back and faced the two outlaws.

"If we've got far to go," he said, "I wish you'd stop in at some lunch counter and order something to eat. I haven't had anything this morning only wind sandwiches. I came out to get a piece of that bear meat for breakfast, and I'm here yet."

"And I came out to hurry you up," George cut in, "and I'm here yet!"

"All right," laughed one of the outlaws, accepting the humor of the request. "If we run across a free lunch sign anywhere, we'll take the two of you in. We're hungry ourselves."

"Have you got anything to eat in this secluded retreat of yours?" asked Tommy. "If you have, we'll hurry up."

"Not a thing!" was the reply.

"Then we'll walk slow!" declared George.

"Look here!" Tommy advised. "Why don't you go back and get some of that bear steak. It's only a little way back to the Cave of the Three Bears, and there's enough meat there to last the four of us a week if we can only keep it from spoiling."

"That's a bright idea," said one of the outlaws, stopping suddenly. "Suppose we do go back and load up with fresh steak."

"I'm for it!" answered Tommy, rubbing his stomach.

They all walked back to the Cave of the Three Bears, and when they left each carried quite a load of fresh meat.

"Have you got a place to cook it?" asked Tommy.

"Have you got any coffee?" asked George.

"I think we'll have to let you boys go pretty soon," one of the outlaws grinned. "If we don't you'll be apt to eat us out of house and home."

"We're some on the eat!" Tommy announced.

After a time the four came, without further

incident, to the chain of caverns which Will and Chester had entered some time before.

They paused for a moment in the connecting tunnel, where the fire had been built on the previous night, and inspected the boulder, which lay a short distance from the opening to the dry channel.

"He's been here and gone on in," one of the outlaws said.

"Perhaps some one else has been here," the other suggested.

"The man who showed us where to enter this labyrinth is the only man in the mountains who knows anything about it!" declared the other. "I'm not certain that we didn't leave the stone out of place when we left this morning. But, if we didn't, our friend is certainly down stairs at this minute! I'll drop down and see, anyway!"

"Push the boys in first," advised the other.

"What do you think of this for an elevator?" demanded Tommy as he backed into the opening. "These fellows seem to be foolish—like a fox!"

George followed Tommy into the tunnel as the latter dropped down, and then the figure of one of the outlaws blocked the opening.

For only a minute, however, for the boys heard a succession of pistol shots, and then the sound of voices rang into the cavern they had just left.

The next instant the outlaws crowded into the tunnel, but instead of dropping down, waited near the entrance, weapons in hand.

Chapter XVII

A MEETING UNDER GROUND

"Some one's got the combination to this channel, all right!" Chester repeated as he joined Will in the larger cavern.

"Did you see them?" asked Will.

"Can't see anything," was the reply, "it's too dark!"

"Then how do you know there's some one coming?"

"We saw them coming toward the cave, didn't we?" asked Chester.

"Look here," Will exclaimed. "Did you see any one entering the mouth of this tunnel?"

"When the mouth of the tunnel is clear," Chester replied, "there's a faint mist of light visible. While I lay up there watching I heard whispering voices and the entrance was blocked."

"Perhaps they've rolled the boulder in front of it," suggested Will.

"You don't like the idea of being caught like a rat in a trap any more than I do," Chester said, "but I really believe that if we ever get out of here alive, we'll have to head toward the west and make our exit on that side of the range."

"I'd like to know how many people know about this hiding place!" Will grumbled. "If people walk out of the valley and drop down here, there

may, for all we know, be others in hiding further down."

"That's a fact," Chester admitted.

"I wish we knew who the people are who are entering the tunnel," Will said. "It may be the robbers, or the detectives, or the sheriffs. It may even be your father, for all we know."

"Well, shall we move on down to see if we can find an outlet?" asked Chester. "That seems to me to be the best thing to do."

"It strikes me that that is the only thing we can do."

The boys were moving on down the almost level floor of the chamber in absolute darkness. for they did not consider it safe to show their electrics when they heard a chuckle in the darkness.

They drew up instantly and listened.

"That's Tommy!" declared Will.

"It can't be," replied Chester.

"Don't you suppose I know that chuckle?"

"Well, the boys weren't with the men I saw near the mouth of the cavern," declared Chester.

The boys listened again for some moments, and then caught sight of a finger of light far up the slope of the tunnel.

"That's a searchlight!" declared Chester.

"It surely is," agreed Will.

While the boys stood in the darkness, waiting and listening, they heard a voice which they had no difficulty in recognizing as that of Tommy.

"This is some basement stairway," the boy said.

The next moment George's voice was heard.

"We must be about nine stories under ground by this time," he said.

There was silence for a moment and then Tommy was heard to ask:

"What's become of our chaperons?"

"There's something doing out in the lobby," the boys heard George say, "and I guess they went back to defend their home and fireside."

"I hope they'll get a couple of bullets in their domes!" declared Chester. "They've helped us out several times, but they've never done it because they wanted to do us a favor!"

"Keep still a minute," Will suggested. "Let's hear what those boys are saying. I'd like to know who they're talking about."

"I haven't got much use for the detectives," they heard George saying, "but I hope they'll get these train robbers and get them good and plenty!"

"So it's the train robbers!" exclaimed Will.

"I don't believe the detectives will ever get within a mile of the robbers," the boys heard Tommy say. "If anybody catches the outlaws, it'll be the sheriff of Fremont county."

"The man at the head of the cowboys?" they heard George ask.

"That's the fellow!" Tommy replied.

"He hasn't got 'em yet," George declared.

"Oh, he's had hard luck, all right enough," Will and Chester heard Tommy say, "but he's a nervy sort of a chap, and he'll take them out with him when he goes."

"That's the fellow that wanted to lynch us!" George grumbled.

"That was a bluff!" Tommy said. "That's

the kind of third degree business they go into out in the mountains. I guess that was all a by-play, anyhow. You don't catch no western sheriff lynching his own prisoners. And this sheriff of Fremont county will just get even with those train robbers for that hold-up!" the boy added.

The boys listened intently for a short time, not daring to show their light yet. From the conversation they had heard they understood that their chums had been placed in the tunnel for safe keeping, and they feared that their captors might appear at any moment.

After a time two shots came from the cavern end of the dry channel, and the close air of the place became almost stifling with the smell of powder smoke. Then the two watchers heard George and Tommy scrambling down to the place where they stood.

Will flashed his light but instantly closed it.

"Did you see that?" they heard Tommy ask.

"Sure I did!"

"What do you think it is?"

"I give it up!" replied George.

No one spoke for an instant and then the call of the Beaver came out of the darkness.

"Slap, slap, slap!"

"Do you mind that, now?" asked Will.

"I don't see how I could fail to recognize that!" Chester said.

"Of course not," Will agreed. "That's the call of the Beaver.

Will answered the challenge, and presently Tommy and George came tumbling down the tunnel into the larger opening and landed almost

at the feet of their chums. In their joy at the meeting, the boys almost hugged each other, which they would not have done in daylight!

"So they got you, too, did they?" asked Tommy.

"I should say not," answered Will.

"But you're here, ain't you?"

"Yes,but we came here of our own free will," Chester cut in.

"How'd you ever find it?" asked George.

"Just blundered into it," was the answer. "We were looking for father, and thought we might find him in the cavern where the three men were seen around the campfire."

"So that passage out there is really the place where the mysterious disappearance took place? Where the three men went up in the air?"

"Where the three men came down into this dry channel!" corrected George.

"Who were the three men?" asked Will.

"If they leave it to me," George replied, "two of them were train robbers and the third was Chester's father."

"That's about the way we had it sized up," Will agreed.

"By the way, Tommy," asked Chester with a slight chuckle, "where's the bear meat you left the camp to get for breakfast?"

"I've got it out here in the cavern!" replied Tommy.

"Is that right, George?" asked Chester.

"We sure have a lot of it out in the vestibule!" agreed George.

"Let's see," Will said, nudging George in the

ribs, "you went after Tommy to bring him back, didn't you?"

"Sure I did," answered George. "And I brought him back, didn't I?"

"You didn't bring him back to camp," Will answered.

"And you're the fellow who wig-wagged to us to come and escort the two of you home," continued Will, addressing George with a laugh.

"Sure I wig-wagged," replied the boy.

"Then why didn't you stay there until we came up and tell us what you wanted. You're a fine boy to wig-wag!"

"Circumstances over which I had no control intervened," replied George. "I got pinched."

Then the story of the adventures of Tommy and George were told and Will told of the doings of those who had left the camp in answer to the call for help.

"Then the sheriffs and their men are not far away?" asked Will.

"Why, they must be in the cavern," answered Tommy. "When the train robbers chucked us down into this dry sewer the sheriffs were entering the audience chamber on the outside."

"And where did the detectives go?" asked Will.

"I don't think they've got done going yet!" replied Tommy. "The train robbers took away their badges, and gave 'em two days in which to get out of town. Gee!" the boy continued. "That sounds like Harrison street station, don't it? give 'em two days to get out of town. They make me sick!"

"So they're all centering around this little old

ex-aqueduct," George said. "In about five minutes the two sheriffs'll be crawling into this old drain and taking the train robbers by the scruff of the neck."

"I'd rather the sheriffs would lug the detectives out of the country," Chester observed. "They're the people who are looking for father."

"You want to keep mighty quiet about any one looking for your father," Will advised. "We are sure to bunt into these two sheriffs before long and if they know that your father is now regarded as a fugitive from justice, they'll get him and ship him back to Chicago, all right!"

"The sheriffs got held up by the train robbers," Tommy went on, "but they can't be blamed for that, and they tried to put us through the third degree when they thought we were in cahoots with the robbers, but they're game all the same. If you ever see those fellows in action you'll know there's something going on."

"And we're going to see them in action right now!" cried George.

A succession of shots came from the entrance to the old channel, and the boys heard the defenders scrambling down toward the chamber where they stood.

Chapter XVIII

THE FINDING OF WAGNER

"Good night!" cried Tommy.

The heavy footsteps came on faster than before. The ping of bullets was in the air, and the old channel was filling with powder smoke. Now and then the flash of a gun lit the passage.

"Me for the tall timber," Tommy went on, springing up the tunnel.

"Here! Where are you going?" shouted Will.

"There's a hiding place up here!" answered Tommy. "We saw it when we came down! Me for the hiding place."

"That's a fact!" Will exclaimed turning to Chester. "You remember the old channel running in from the southeast?"

"We'll have to get somewhere right soon!" Chester answered. Perhaps that is as good a place as any."

Bullets singing down the narrow passage indicated that the sheriffs and their men had already entered the subterranean channel from above.

The train robbers were defending the passage heroically, but the officers were coming bravely on.

Directly the boys came to the lead which cut the south wall of the main channel into the shape of a "V." They passed on up this dry channel

just as the train robbers, retreating step by step, came to the entrance.

"Shoot to kill!" the boys heard one of the outlaws saying.

"Do you know the way to the other end?" asked the second outlaw.

"I've been told how to find it," was the answer, "but I never made my way through it. Those sheriffs are game to come crowding into a hole like this in front of two armed and desperate men."

"You get up against the real thing when you strike a Wyoming sheriff," the other outlaw declared.

"Throw up your hands!" a heavy voice came from above.

"Come and take us!" was the only answer.

Another storm of bullets was followed by a groan of pain.

"They got me!" the boys heard one of the men say.

"They got me, too!" said the other. "It's a wonder we haven't been cut into ribbons before this!"

"All we can do now is to lay down and shoot as long as we've got ammunition," the first speaker advised.

"You may as well surrender, boys!" They heard Sheriff Pete's heavy voice saying. "I'm coming down there after you!"

The only answer from the outlaws was a volley of bullets, punctuated with oaths. Tommy turned to Will with a low chuckle.

"This seems to be a nice quiet Boy Scout ex-

cursion, doesn't it?" he asked. "We come up on the mountains to have a pleasant vacation, and we butt into a scene that wouldn't be admitted to the stage of any theatre because the critics would say that it wasn't true to life!"

"We certainly do strike life in the raw!" replied Will.

"Are you going to surrender?" shouted the sheriff from above.

"I'll bet they don't," whispered George.

"You're on!" Tommy shouted. "I'll bet they do."

The boys listened anxiously for the reply.

"I'm coming down there now!" they heard Sheriff Pete say.

"There isn't one man in a million who would dare walk into a trap like this," Will mused. "I wonder if this sheriff we've been finding fault with will have the nerve to do it."

"You see if he hasn't got the nerve to do it," Tommy answered.

The outlaws fired once more, and then the boys heard their weapons clattering down the tunnel.

"That's the stuff, boys!" the sheriff said.

They heard him sliding and scrambling down the channel, and turned on their flashlights. The sheriff paused with an exclamation of surprise, but came steadily on in a moment, his deputies not far in the rear.

"Throw up your hands there, you with the light!" cried the officer.

"I ain't going to throw up my hands," Tommy called out with a chuckle, "but if it'll give you

any satisfaction, I'll throw up my job as a man-hunter. I have no further use for it!"

"That must be the Boy Scouts," the voice of the Sweetwater sheriff said. "I wonder how they got here."

As the officers came on under the rays of the searchlights, the boys having now stepped into the main tunnel, the outlaws stumbled to their feet and stood leaning against the wall. They were wounded in several places and blood was flowing quite freely, but their jaws were set in lines of determination.

The sheriffs glanced keenly about and smiled as their eyes took in the boys grouped together in the tunnel.

"What about it?" asked Sheriff Pete.

"That's a long story," Will answered.

One of the outlaws now stepped forward, although he still held himself upright by one hand on the wall.

"You're a nervy chap, Sheriff," he said.

"Turn and turn about is fair play!" replied the officer. "It isn't so very long ago that you held me up."

"Any man can hold up another when he has a loaded gun in his face," said the outlaw.

"It strikes me," the sheriff said, "that you'd better be removed from this hole as quickly as possible. Your wounds probably need attention."

"We're not sobbing about the wounds," was the reply. "The only kick we've got coming is that our ammunition gave out."

"You would have been taken in time!" was the reply.

"I guess that's right, with a man like you on our track. I've been in a good many tight spots but I never saw a man walk into a storm of bullets and appear to like it as you have done today."

"Never mind that now," the Sheriff cut in. "We're going to get you out so you can do a little work for the state before you die."

"Say," Tommy exclaimed as the officers and prisoners started to climb the steep tunnel, "when you get to the top have one of the men start a big fire. I'm so hungry that I could eat my way out of this rock like it was a cheese."

"What you going to cook?" asked Will.

"Bear steak," replied Tommy.

"That's a joke!" declared Chester.

"Joke is it?" exclaimed Tommy. "You wait till we get out there and see whether it is or not. I went out after bear steak for breakfast, didn't I? Well, I got it, didn't I?"

"Breakfast!" repeated George, rubbing his stomach. "It must be afternoon, and I'm hungry enough to bite a corner off the Masonic Temple."

"One o'clock!" said Will, looking at his watch.

"Are you boys really going to cook breakfast in the cavern?" asked the sheriff. "Why not go to the camp?"

"Because we can't walk to the camp without first acquiring sustenance!" chuckled Tommy. "I'm empty from the top of my head to the end of my big toe!"

"If you'll ask your men to gather a lot of dry wood," George suggested, "we'll have a lot of bear steak ready to eat in about ten minutes."

"But we haven't got any salt!" objected the sheriff.

"Don't you think we haven't got any salt," Tommy replied. "You never saw a Boy Scout go out into the woods without plenty of salt and matches. And don't you think we don't know how to build a fire with one match and broil a steak over coals in ten minutes."

"All right!" laughed the sheriff. "You boys seem to be able to take care of yourselves."

"You didn't seem to think so a few hours ago," Will answered.

"There's one thing about you boys I really like," the sheriff returned with a hearty laugh. "The third degree makes about as much impression on you as it would on the Sphinx or on the Goddess of Liberty in New York harbor."

"That was the third degree, was it, then?" asked Will.

"Do you think I'd string up a lot of babies?" demanded the sheriff.

"Run along, now!" Tommy exclaimed. "Run along, Mr. Officer, and tell your men to bring up a lot of dry wood."

The officers made their way out, followed by George and Tommy, but Will and Chester still remained under ground.

"Did you hear anything in this tunnel?" asked Chester.

"I thought I did hear a moan, but the sheriff was talking in that voice of his at the time and I wasn't certain."

"Well," Chester said, "I believe father's in here somewhere."

"Why do you think that?"

"I've told you about how he wanted to move to this cavern, haven't I? And how he spent considerable time here?"

"You certainly have."

"And about my suspicions that he informed the outlaws of the underground passages?"

"Yes, you told me all that."

"Then you heard what the robbers said about some one having moved the stone, or gone in during their absence?"

"I had entirely forgotten that!" declared Will.

"Well, then, don't you see," Chester continued, "that they must have been speaking of father? That's why I think he's in here."

"Perhaps we'd better follow this channel and see if we can find him," Will suggested. "It does seem as if he might be here."

The bed of the old channel was very steep, and the boys scrambled up it with difficulty. After proceeding a few paces they heard a low groan and their flashlight showed the figure of a man lying on a narrow ledge of rock on the south side.

Chester darted forward instantly, almost falling on his face in his eagerness to reach his father and bent over the figure.

"It's father!" he shouted back to Will.

"Alive?"

"I'm afraid not."

Will lost no time in gaining the boy's side.

The ex-convict lay with his face turned upward, his arms folded across his breast. At first there were no indication of life.

Chapter XIX

SHERIFF PETE'S WINK

"He can't be dead!" cried Chester, trying to lift the still figure in his arms. "The wound he received was not a serious one."

"I'll tell you what I think," Will replied. "I think he's weak from lack of food and sleep I don't believe these train robbers have been very considerate of him."

"But I don't see why they should misuse him!"

"They probably didn't have enough to eat themselves," Will returned. "Don't you remember how one of them came to camp and set Tommy to cooking for him, and how we frightened him away by saying that the detectives were just beyond the circle of light?"

"That was the night I was loitering around the camp waiting to get to one of you boys in order to ask you to help me find father," Chester replied. "Don't you remember you chased me up that night, and I ran away in the darkness, and one of the boys came upon the train robber and the other came upon one of the detectives."

"That was Tommy and Sandy," Will answered. "George and I were asleep in our tent when all that took place."

"I quess he's about starved all right!" Chester said, lifting his father into a sitting position.

"We'd better get some of the men down here and have him carried into the cavern."

"But look here," Will warned, "there mustn't a word be said about the detectives coming in here after him!"

"Why not?" asked Chester.

"Because, as I have told you before, if the sheriff understands that your father was a fugitive from justice, he'll send him to Chicago under arrest. It will be his duty to do so, in fact."

"And what do you boys propose to do with him?"

"We're going to take him back to Chicago and keep him out of the reach of the police. He knows something about a case we're interested in which he will never tell if sent back to prison."

"If he's sent back to prison," Chester replied, "you may be sure that he won't be willing to help anybody."

"He is innocent of the crime of which he was convicted, isn't he?" asked Will. "In other words, he was jobbed!"

"That's the truth!" cried Chester.

"Well, what we've got to do is to prove that!" Will went on.

"Can you do it?" asked the son, anxiously.

"We think we can," was the reply.

"If you can, father will do anything he can for you, you may be sure of that," Chester answered warmly.

"But the whole success of our scheme depends on our keeping your father out of the clutches of the officers until we land him in Mr. Horton's

office in Chicago. For the first time in our lives," Will continued, "we are opposing the officers of the law. As a rule that isn't a good thing for Boy Scouts to do, but we think we are fully justified in the course we are taking in this case."

"What is it you want father to testify to?" asked Chester.

"I don't think we'd better stop now to discuss that," Will answered.

"I'm sure it can't be anything dishonorable."

"It's nothing dishonorable," Will assured the boy. "We believe that your father's testimony will save the life of a young man accused of murder. That's all I can tell you now."

"You refer to the Fremont case?" asked Chester.

"Exactly!" answered Will. "To the Fremont suicide case."

"The police call it the Fremont murder case!"

"So you have been reading about that, too, have you?" asked Will.

"I read about it in the newspapers on the day following what took place at the bank," Chester answered, "and I couldn't help a feeling of contempt for the police when I understood how wrong they were."

"So you know about that, too?"

"I know all about it!" replied Chester.

Will could have hugged the boy. He had long been wondering whether the testimony of Mr. Wagner would be accepted in court after the wound which had rendered him mentally incompetent had been discussed by physicians. He knew that in many cases men so injured never fully recovered.

It seemed almost like a miracle that the escaped convict's son should know something of the matter, too. The boy knew that even if Mr. Wagner fully recovered from his injury the police would object to his testimony on the ground of previous insanity. If the boy could corroborate the statements made by his father, that would prove sufficient.

Will was about to ask the lad further questions when the escaped convict opened his eyes and looked about.

His gaze sought the searchlight first, and then rested on the face of his son. Chester drew nearer and bent over him.

"Did I have a fall?" the man asked weakly.

He put his thin hand to his head as he spoke and drew it away covered with blood.

"Why this seems to be a fresh wound," Chester exclaimed, anxiously.

"Yes," replied the father, "I remember of hearing the sound of guns, and sensing the odor of powder smoke, and started to run down the passage and fell. I remember a shooting pain in my head and that's about all until I heard your voices and saw the light."

"Do you know where you are?" asked Will.

The escaped convict looked inquiringly at his son.

"Who is this boy?" he asked.

"A friend who has come to establish your innocence," was the reply.

"That is impossible," replied Wagner. "Every police official in Chicago is convinced of my guilt. They jobbed me to prison in the first instance, and they are bound to keep me there!"

"Who were the detectives?" asked Will.

"Katz and Cullen!" was the answer.

"I see," Will said musingly.

"But we mustn't permit father to remain here," Chester cut in. "All these questions can be answered at another time."

"That's right," Will agreed. "And I'll go to the cavern and ask some of the men to carry your father out."

The boy was back in five minutes with Sheriff Pete and Deputy Seth. The sheriff looked down pityingly on the wounded man for a moment and then took him in his arms as if he had been a child and carried him to the cavern, where the boys and the deputies were assembled around a roaring fire over which Tommy and George were broiling bear steaks.

"Say, that listens good to me," George exclaimed, as the wounded man was laid down near the rear. "It appears that we're closing this case up in jig time."

"I guess we've got it about closed up," Will answered.

"There's only one thing we've got to do now," George added, "and that is to get rid of those two bum detectives."

"Last call for dinner in the dining car!" cried Tommy.

They all flocked to the fire, and Tommy and George presented each with a bear steak with the explanation that more would be forthcoming. The two train robbers looked on longingly.

"You boys suggested the bringing in of this meat," Tommy said, after a time, "and so I'm

going to cook each of you a two pound steak."

"I guess we can take care of them all right," one of the outlaws replied. "We've been hungry for about a week."

"Say, kid," the other outlaw cut in, "I'd like to be just your age, and be a Boy Scout, with all the medals you've got, and money enough to travel about the world looking for trouble and meeting it like a man!"

"You had a chance once," Tommy answered rather pityingly.

"Never," was the reply. "I was reared in the slums of New York, and became a criminal before I was six years old. There were no Boy Scout organizations in those days, and so I never had any one ready and willing to point out the road that would lead to a successful life."

"Well, if there were no Boy Scouts to help you along then," Tommy replied, "there are plenty now to show the right way."

"And they are doing it, too, so far as I can see," Sheriff Pete cut in. "They seem to be doing a lot of good in the world."

"We try to," Tommy said, and turned back to cook the steaks promised to the outlaws. "And most of the time we succeed," he added.

"What was it one of you boys said about these two detectives?" asked Sheriff Pete, as he stood talking with Will, busy at the same time with a slice of bear meat.

"Why," Will answered, "I guess the remark was that the next thing for us to do would be to get rid of those detectives. They think they own the whole state of Wyoming."

"Chicago men are they?" asked the sheriff.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Do they claim to be here on business?"

"Why," replied Will in a hestitating tone, "they claim to be here after a fugitive from justice, but I guess they're on a hunting trip."

"If they're here on official business," the sheriff said, "I should think they'd report to me."

"It may be." Will suggested, "that they are in some way associated with these train robbers."

The sheriff looked at the boy with wide open eyes for a moment, and then drew one eyelid down in a long, significant wink.

"You really think they stand in with these outlaws?" he asked.

"Why," replied Will, with an equally significant wink, "I think they ought to be taken out to Lander or Green River and made to give an account of themselves."

"Come to think about it," the sheriff said, with a smile, "I've noticed several suspicious circumstances lately, and I think it really might be a good thing to take them to the county seat and make them give an account on themselves."

Chapter XX

DETECTIVES IN TROUBLE

While the sheriff and the boy were talking, Katz and Cullen came tramping angrily into the cavern. They stood regarding the sheriff and his deputies with scornful glances for a moment and then, ignoring them entirely, strolled up to where Will was standing.

"You are under arrest," Katz said.

"What for?" asked Will, as the others gathered around him.

"For participating in the escape of a fugitive from justice."

"Where is the fugitive from justice?" asked Will.

"I can't place my hands on him at this moment," was the arrogant reply, "but I'm going to know where he is before I permit these men to depart. I've stood about all the impudence I care to."

"What's that making all that noise?" called Tommy, from the fire.

The two detectives turned toward the boy.

"You are under arrest, too!" Cullen shouted.

"Why don't you take some one of your own size?" asked Tommy. "Why don't you go on and arrest some of these men?"

"I'll do that if it's necessary!" Katz exclaimed. "And look here," he went on. "I command you

all to assist me in the capture of a fugitive from justice named Warren W. Wagner, as escaped convict who is wanted in Chicago for the crime of murder!"

"Do you think this Wagner person is here?" asked Seth.

"I haven't a doubt of it," was the angry reply.

"Then, like a good little boy, you chase out and find him."

"I'll find him quick enough," retorted Katz, advancing toward the spot where Wagner lay. "I'll find him too quick to please most of you fellows! Perhaps you can tell me who this man is."

"The Boy Scouts gathered about the detective and Chester even sprang forward as if to defend his father from the officer's touch. It was Sheriff Pete, however, who prevented the actual arrest of the escaped convict at that time.

As the two detectives moved forward, attempting to brush the boys rudely aside, the sheriff seized Katz by the shoulder and swung him over to Sheriff Gilmore. Then he grabbed Cullen by the scruff of the neck and sent him spinning into the arms of Seth.

"What do you fellows mean by coming here and taking possession of our camp?" he thundered. "I'll teach you to get fresh around here! Put the handcuffs on the fellows, boys!"

One of the wounded outlaws raised himself from the floor and chuckled viciously as the two men were adorned with the manacles.

"Say," Katz exclaimed, trying to move toward the outlaws, "how did you get here? I've a

great mind to put you both under arrest for your treatment of me a few hours ago."

"You're under arrest yourself!" laughed the outlaw pointing to the handcuffs. "You're a pretty skate to talk about arresting me."

"I protest against this, sir," exclaimed Katz, turning to Sheriff Pete. "I am Joseph J. Katz, detective of Chicago, and this is Edward E. Cullen, my associate. We are here under protection of the laws of your state, in quest of a fugitive from justice and I protest against this outrage."

"Where are your extradition papers?" demanded the sheriff.

"We don't usually get extradition papers until we get the man," scoffed Katz. "You ought to know that, if you're an officer."

"I mean your authority from the Governor of Illinois," said Sheriff Pete angrily.

"You can wire to the Chief of Police at Chicago, and see if what we say is not true," Katz answered.

"But your papers," insisted the Sheriff.

"They were to be forwarded to us," replied Katz.

"I don't believe they're detectives at all!" Tommy cut in.

"I don't think they have any authority to make arrests," Will said, with a sly wink at the sheriff. "If they have, where are their badges?"

"They were stolen!" shouted Katz. "These Boy Scouts took mine, and those train robbers, who seem to be under arrest now, took Cullen's."

"You want to look out when you come down

into Wyoming," said the sheriff with a chuckle. "I've known Chicago detectives to come down here and have their socks stolen off their feet!"

"Aw, they ain't detectives," argued Tommy. "They belong to this bunch of train robbers. I saw 'em talking with the robbers not very long ago. You just ask these robbers if these two men don't belong to their gang."

As Tommy spoke he turned to where the two robbers lay and gave a very grave and significant wink.

"They belong to our gang, all right enough," one of the outlaws stated, remembering various indignities they had received at the hands of detectives.

"That's a lie!" thundered Katz.

"Lie nothing!" replied the outlaw. "These fellows brought in two burros loaded with provisions for us, and we haven't been able to get to them yet. If you go back in the valley to the west, and travel north a few miles, you'll find where the burros and provisions are hidden away."

Tommy drew nearer to the outlaw and under pretense of picking something from the floor whispered in his ear:

"We'll see that you get a year off your sentence for that. We've just got to get rid of these imitation detectives."

"I don't believe you can make it stick, Katz," the other outlaw cried out, apparently in a very serious tone, although there was a wrinkle of humor about his grim mouth. "When we started out to rob the Union Pacific train you promised

to see that we got provisions, and you didn't keep your word!"

The eyes of the two detectives stuck out, as Tommy afterwards expressed it, far enough to hang a coat and hat on. They almost foamed with rage as they stamped about the cavern, still linked together with the steel handcuffs.

"We're being jobbed!" Katz shouted.

"It's a frame-up!" echoed Cullen.

"Frame up nothing!" laughed one of the outlaws.

"Do you mean to say," said Sheriff Pete, turning to the two prisoners, "that these two men who claim to be detectives are actually connected with your gang?"

"That's what we'll swear to!" declared one of the outlaws.

"Two years off for that!" chuckled Tommy in a low tone.

"I tell you it 's a frame up!" shouted Katz. "It's a dirty trick to get us out of the state without arresting this fugitive from justice."

"I'm sorry boys," Sheriff Pete said to them, with official gravity, although there was a twinkle in his eyes, "but under the circumstances, it's my duty to take you to Lander and give you a hearing before the grand jury. Personally, I have my doubts as to the truth of the charges made against you, but at the same time I've got to take ministerial cognizance of them. I'm sorry, but it's my duty."

"And in the meantime," yelled Cullen, "these Boy Scouts will get this fugitive from justice out of our reach!"

"I don't know anything about that!" said the

sheriff, "but if they try to do anything of that kind, I'm afraid they'll succeed."

"Well," Gilmore, the Sweetwater sheriff said, "I presume we'd better be moving along with the prisoners. If it's true that these two alleged detectives, who now turn out to be train robbers," he added with a glance at the boys, "have a camp with plenty of provisions at the north end of the next valley, we'd better take the whole bunch there and get the provisions and pack the whole outfit over to Lander with us."

"Are you going back to camp now?" asked Sheriff Pete, turning to Will.

"Just as soon as Tommy gets filled up on bear steak, I think we'd better be moving."

Sheriff Gilmore and the deputies now started away with the four prisoners and the boys watched them sliding and scrambling down the slope to the gully.

Will reached out and took Sheriff Pete by the hand.

"You're a brick!" he said. "You not only know how to do things, but you know how to do them right. If you ever come up to Chicago, don't forget to call on Lawyer Horton, and he'll tell you where we are."

"I'll not fail to do so," the sheriff answered, "but, in the meantime," he went on, "it ought to take about a week or two for these detectives to establish their innocence, eh?"

"I should say about two weeks," replied Will. "And see here," the boy went on, "I hope you won't be too hard on those train robbers. They're pretty decent fellows after all."

"They're the first men that ever held me up!" laughed the sheriff.

"Forget it!" exclaimed Will.

"Oh, I don't lay that up against them!" the sheriff replied. "After all," he continued, "they were careful not to injure any one on the holdup they're accused of, and I don't think they'll get more than five or six years."

The officers and the boys parted with feelings of mutual regret. They had not had much faith or confidence in each other at first, but in the end each group knew the worth of the other. The parting between the boys and Seth was particularly heartfelt. Although Sheriff Pete had been trying to reach information he sought in his own way, the deputy had faced him down when he believed that the boys were to be lynched. There was many a good laugh after that, in the room of the Sheriff at Lander.

When at last the boys reached their camp and the two men who had brought the escaped convict down had disappeared, Sandy came creeping out from under a pile of blankets in one of the tents.

"What do you know about that?" asked Tommy, pointing to the boy.

Sandy yawned and rubbed his eyes.

"Say, what time is it?" he asked.

"Four o'clock!" replied Will,

"Is it yesterday or today?" asked Sandy.

"It's day after tomorrow!" grinned Tommy.

"Don't get funny, now," Sandy advised. "Whatever day it is, I've been asleep ever since you boys went away."

Chapter XXI

CONCLUSION

"You never have!" declared Tommy.

"Honest!" replied Sandy. "I filled myself up with provisions and crawled under the blanket and went to sleep just after you went away to get some bear steak for breakfast. Did you get the steak?" the boy added with a grin.

"You bet I did," answered Tommy, "and I brought it back with me," he added, stroking the waistband of his trousers. "How's your shoulder?"

"Fine as a fiddle," was the reply. "I'm not going to have any trouble with it after this! Did you find Chester's fond parent," he added, glancing in the direction of the escaped convict.

"Sure we did," replied Tommy. "And, do you know," the boy went on, "that we needn't have bothered about finding him at all. Chester knows everything about the Fremont case that the father does."

"Is that right, Chester?" asked Sandy.

"Now you come on over here to father," Chester said, "and we'll ask him what took place in the private room of Fremont's bank that night, and we'll see if his memory of the things which occured there is the same as mine."

The boys now all trooped to the tent where Mr. Wagner had been placed and Chester asked:

"Do you know why these boys are here, father?"

"To take me back to prison, I suppose," was the almost sullen reply.

"They are here to establish your innocence," the son went on. "Do you know why?"

The father glanced keenly from his son to the others and finally asked, his voice trembling with excitement:

"Why should they take an interest in me?"

"Because," Will broke in, "you can help us, and we want to help you. We have information that you are innocent of the crime of which you were convicted, and we believe that you have information which will prevent the conviction of an innocent man."

"Do you refer to the Fremont case?" asked Wagner.

"Exactly," replied Will. "And I'd like to ask you now," the boy went on, "before anything more is said, why you never communicated with young Fremont's attorney. He advertised for you extensively, and you might have held conference with him without subjecting yourself to arrest."

"I saw the advertisement," was the reply, "but I thought it was only a trap set by the police. I was determined not to go back to the penitentiary. If I had been captured by the police, I would have killed myself. I had no money, no influence, and it would have been impossible for me to establish my innocence, so I decided to let young Fremont look out for himself. I know now that I was wrong."

"You were in the bank that July night?" asked Will.

"Yes, I was there with my son," was the reply.

The boys looked wonderingly at Chester.

"What took place?" asked Will.

"Fremont was working late in his private room, and the janitor and nightwatchman were moving about the building, from the deposit vaults in the basement to the ironclad room which enclosed the big safe.

"I went there to see Mr. Fremont in order to secure financial help. He had been an old friend of my parents, and I had every reason to believe that he would assist me if I could get to him. After a long time I attracted the attention of the night watchman, and he admitted me at a side door on the request of Mr. Fremont."

"Who else was in the building at that time?" asked Will.

"No one that I know of," was the reply. "I stated my case to Mr. Fremont in the presence of my son and he handed me one hundred dollars in small bills, advising me to remain in hiding until I could arrange for a new trial. He said when he gave me the money that the sum was more than he had left, but that he would never again feel that he needed money.

"I did not understand what he meant, and said so. He told me then that he had been plunging heavily in Wall street. He said that he had lost every dollar he had in the world, and that his interest in the bank would be taken from him the next day unless a wealthy friend he was depending on came to his assistance that very night."

"Did he tell you the name of the man he expected there that night?" asked Will.

"He did," replied the escaped convict, "but I do not now recall the name. I can't for the life of me bring it back to my mind."

"The name," Chester interrupted, "was Myron M. Douglass."

"A Chicago multi-millionaire!" exclaimed Will.

"I asked Mr. Fremont what course he intended to pursue, and he replied that there was only one thing he could do if the man he had appealed to refused to aid him. As he told me this he opened a drawer in his desk and pointed to an automatic revolver lying on top of a pile of papers."

"And you left it lying there?" asked Will.

"No," Chester answered, "I snatched the revolver out of the drawer and brought it away with me. When we left the private room by the side door, Mr. Fremont was standing beside his desk with a smile upon a very white face. He said he had another revolver in another drawer, and would use it if he did not hear from Mr. Douglass before midnight."

"Did you believe him to be in earnest?" asked Will.

"I did not think he would kill himself when it came down to the real point."

"Did you immediately leave the vicinity of the bank?" asked the boy.

"No," replied Chester. "We walked about the building until after twelve o'clock."

"Did you hear any significant sounds?" asked Will.

"Pistol-shots," was the reply.

"Then you knew what had taken place?"

"Yes, sir, we thought we did."

"What next?"

"While we stood at the side door of the bank, wondering what we ought to do, Mr. Fremont's son came running up the steps. At first I felt disposed to give him some intimation as to what had taken place, but I hadn't the courage to do so. He opened the side door with a key and entered, and we left the city and the state. We came here, and I was dazed by a fall, but this last hurt has corrected the injury done by the first one."

"There you are!" said Will. "The case is closed. The Boy Scouts may as well go back to Chicago now. There's one more mystery. Who built the fire in your old cave?"

"I did before the last fall," Wagner said.

"Of course, we can stay here and fish and hunt if we want to," laughed Will, "and I think it may be well to do so for a week or so, but right now we have come to The Ending of the Trail."

The boys spent two very pleasant weeks in Wyoming without further annoyance. When they returned to Chicago, Wagner and Chester went with them. The case against young Fremont fell to the ground as soon as the testimony of Wagner and his son was taken, and the innocence of the escaped convict was established so thoroughly to the satisfaction of the police that he was never tried again.

The boys saw both Wagner and Chester were provided with congenial situations. After the boys had been in Chicago a couple of weeks they met Katz and Cullen on Clark street. The

detectives flamed red in the face at sight of the boys, but were very humble when addressing them.

"We have forgotten what took place in Wyoming," Katz said significantly.

"And so have we," replied Tommy. "No one here knows anything about it! It was rather a mean trick to play on you, but we had to do something to get Wagner to testify in the Fremont case."

"Forget it!" cried Katz, and the two went on their way, after receiving their badges from Tommy.

The boys had been in Chicago not more than a month when a letter from the famous criminal lawyer brought them to his office again.

"Are you boys ready to take a trip to the north?" he asked. "I want you to go way up into the Hudson Bay country and do a little work that a group of Boy Scouts can do better than any one else in the world."

"Sure, we'll go!" answered Will. "We were saying last night that we were getting tired of hanging around Chicago."

The boys started away the very next day. What they saw and did on the journey will be found in the next volume of this series entitled:

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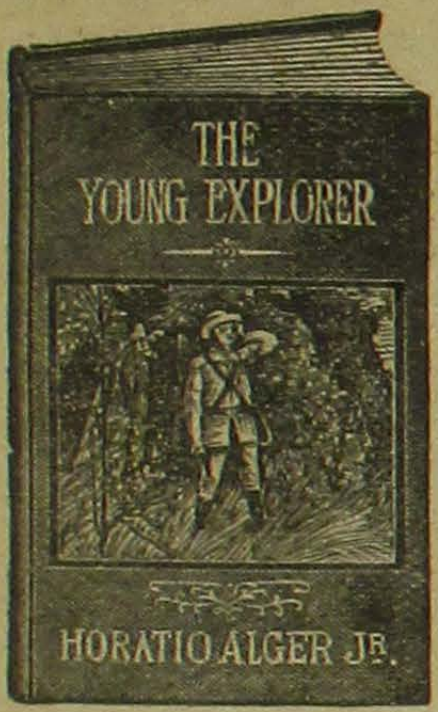

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